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The Works of Leonard Merrick

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN

AND OTHER STORIES

The Works of

LEONARD MERRICK

CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH. With an Introduction by Sir J. M. Barrie.

WHEN LOVE FLIES OUT O' THE WINDOW. With an Introduction by Sir William Robertson Nicoll.

THE QUAINT COMPANIONS. With an Introduction by H. G. Wells.

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ONE MAN'S VIEW. With an Introduction by

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN

AND OTHER STORIES

By LEONARD MERRICK

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
W. J. LOCKE

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE

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INTRODUCTION

ONE of our most delightful novelists has recently written a preface to a collection of his short stories in which he apologises for disinterring them from magazines and resuscitating them in book form. I think he ought not to have done it. If a preface were needed, it should have been written rather as an appeal, than as a warning. It should have been in the nature of a bugle-blast. It should have said, in effect: "Here, my faithful and gentle readers who, owing to the limitations of time and space and the worries of the world, have missed much of my best and most cherished work—here is an opportunity of an unexpected feast." I confess that such an appeal would not have been modest—and the author in question is the most modest of our confraternity—but the assertion would have been true. Now, with the agreeable task before me of writing a preface to another man's collection, I am not bound by any such sense of modesty, and I should like to make clear once more certain issues which my friend above referred to has, to a certain extent, confused.

In the first place, it must be understood that the novel and the short story are two entirely distinct artistic expressions, as different as the great oil-painting and the miniature. And as rarely as the accomplished landscape-painter and the accomplished miniaturist are incarnate in one and the same individual, so rarely are the accomplished novelist and the accomplished short story writer thus incarnate. The most fervent admirers of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, among whom I am proud to count myself, will not claim for his novels, though possessing the incalculable and indefinable personal touch, the magical genius of expression which is to be found in all his work —even in *The Absent-minded Beggar,* the perfection of statement and the flawless technique of

are between thirty and forty thousand words in length. Among Thackeray's many sketches may be found a few which we understand as short stories, but they do not rank with *Henry Esmond* and *The Newcomes*.

The essential novelist accustomed to his broad canvas, to the multiplicity of human destinies with which he is concerned and their inter-relation, to his varied backgrounds, to the free space which his art allows him both for minute analysis of character and for his own philosophical reflections on life, is apt to find himself absurdly cramped within the narrow confines of the short story. His short stories have a way of becoming condensed novels. They contain more stuff than they ought to hold, at a sacrifice of balance, directness and clearness of exposition. Now, without dogmatising in the conventional fashion, or indeed in any fashion, over what a short story ought or ought not to be, or asserting definite laws of technique, I think it is obvious that if a story told in ten thousand words would have been a better, clearer, more fully developed story told in a hundred thousand, it is not a perfectly told story. For, though there is a modern tendency to revolt against an older school of criticism which set technique over subject, and to scoff at form, yet we cannot get away from the fact that

the told story, whether long or short, is a work of art, and is subject to the eternal canons whereby every art is governed. No matter what a man has to say, if he does not strive to express it perfectly, he is offending. The "condensed novel," being imperfect, is an offence.

On the other hand, the essential short story writer engaged upon a novel, is apt to be dismayed by the vastness of the canvas he has to cover. His habit of mind—minute, delicate and swift—wars against a conception of the architectonics of a novel. In consequence, his novel may appear thin, episodical and laboured, with scenes spun out beyond their value, thus missing their dramatic effect and spoiling the balance of the work. If, therefore, a story of a hundred

latiques alone would have brought him fame. Stevenson was master of both crafts. Who shall say whether *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* or *The Ebb Tide* is the more perfect work of art?

Now among contemporary writers, Mr. Leonard Merrick is eminently one who, like Balzac and Stevenson, is gifted with the double faculty. His reputation as a novelist rests on a sure foundation, and his novels in this edition of his works will be dealt with by other hands. But, owing to the fact of the novel being in the commercial world "more important" than the short story, his claim to the distinct reputation of a short story writer has more or less been overlooked. Again, it is popularly supposed that a writer of fiction regards the short story as either a relaxation from more arduous toil or as a means of adding a few extra pounds to his income. In his acquiescence in this disastrous superstition lies my quarrel with my distinguished preface-writing friend. Now, although I do not say that we are all such high-minded folk that none of us has ever stooped to "pot-boiling," yet I assert that every conscientious artist approaches a short story with the same earnestness as he does a novel. Further, that in proportion to its length he devotes to it more concentration, more loving and scrupulous care. There are days during the

writing of a novel when that combination of fierce desire to work and sense of power which one loosely talks about as "inspiration," is at ebb, and others when it is at flow. Homer nods sometimes. No man can bestow equal essence of himself on every page of a long novel. But a short story is generally written at full-tide. By its nature it can be finished before the impulse is over. There is time to weigh every word of it, attend to the rhythm of every sentence, adjust the delicate balance of the various parts, and there is the thrilling consciousness of unity. Instead of the climax being months off, there it is at hand to be reached in a few glad hours. So, far from

and form. There is always the danger of the good being hidden, of bad and good being confused together in the public mind, and of the term "magazine story" becoming one of contemptuous and unthinking reproach, as was the term "yellow-back" a generation ago. Accordingly it is well that now and again a word should be said in deprecation of an attitude which a tired and fiction-worn world is liable to adopt; and it is well to remind it that in the aforesaid welter there are many beautiful works of art, and to beseech it to exercise discrimination.

The writer of an introduction to the work of a literary comrade labours under certain difficulties. He ought not to usurp the functions of the critic into whose hands the volume, when published, will come, and he is anxious, for the sake of prudence, not to use the language of hyperbole, though he has it in his heart to do so. But, at least, I can claim for these short stories of Mr. Leonard Merrick, that each, by its perfection of form and the sincerity of its making, takes rank as a work of art. In none is there a word too little or a word too much. Everywhere one sees evidence of the pain through which the soul of the artist has passed on its way to the joy of creation. Everywhere is seen the firmness of outline which only comes by conviction of truth, and

the light and shade which is only attained by a man who loves his craft.

The field covered by Mr. Merrick in this collection is one which he has made peculiarly his own. Mainly it is the world of the artist, the poet, the journalist, in the years when hopes are high and funds are low, when the soul is full and the stomach empty. It is neither the Bohemia of yesterday's romance nor the Bohemia of drunken degradation, but the sober, clean-living, struggling Bohemia of to-day. It is a sedate, hard-up world of omnibuses, lodgings, second-rate tea shops and restaurants. Yet he does not belong to the static school who set down the mere greyness of their conditions. He is a poet, making—

Girl, a realist of the realists if you like; but here, as everywhere in his work, are profound pity, tenderness and sympathetic knowledge of the human heart. He writes not only of things seen, but of things felt. Whatever qualities his work may have, it has the great quality essential to all artistic endeavour—sincerity.

WILLIAM J. LOCKE.

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN

AND OTHER STORIES

THE MAN WHO UNDERSTOOD WOMEN

"Our bitterest remorse is not for our sins, but for our stupidities."—*Excerpt from Wendover's new novel.*

NOTHING had delighted Wendover so much when his first book appeared as some reviewer's reference to "the author's knowledge of women." He was then six or seven and twenty, and the compliment uplifted him the more because he had long regretted violently that he knew even less of women than do most young men. The thought of women fascinated him. He yearned to captivate them, to pass lightly from one love-affair to another, to have the right to call himself "blasé." Alas! a few dances in the small provincial town that he had left when he was eighteen comprised nearly all his sentimental experiences; during his years of struggle in London he had been so abominably hard up that lodging-house keepers and barmaids were almost the only women he addressed, and as his beverage was "a glass of bitter," the barmaids had been strictly commercial.

To be told that he understood women enrap-

tured him. "Instinct!" he said to himself. "Now and then a man is born who knows the feminine mind intuitively." And in his next book there was an abundance of his fanciful psychology. Denied companionship with women, he revelled in writing about them, and drew from the pages in which he posed as their delineator something of the exultation that he would have derived from being their lover. There were even pages after which he felt sated with conquest. At these times nothing accorded with his mood so well as to parade the Park and pretend to himself that the sight of the most attractive of the women bored him.

But as loneliness really cried within him pathetically, he had an adventure, culminating in

that he produced hit the popular taste, and he began to make a very respectable income.

Now, for the first time, he had opportunities for meeting the class of women that he had been writing about, and he found, to his consternation, that they failed to recognise him as an affinity after all. They were very amiable, but, like the farmer with the claret, he "never got any forrader." He perceived that his profundities were thought tedious, and that his attentions were thought raw. It was a sickening admission for an authority on women to have to make, but when he tried to flirt he felt shy.

At last he decided that all the women whom he knew were too frivolous to appeal to a man of intellect, and that their company wearied him unutterably.

But, though he had reached middle-age, he had never as yet been really in love.

In the autumn of his forty-second year—few people judged him to be so much—he removed to Paris. Some months afterwards, in the interests of a novel that he had begun, he deserted his hotel in the rue d'Antin for a pension de famille on the left bank. This establishment, which was supported chiefly by English and American girls studying art, supplied the "colour" that he need-

ed for his earlier chapters; and it was here that he made the acquaintance of Miss Searle.

Miss Searle was about six-and-twenty, bohemian and ambitious beyond her talents. Such pensions de famille abound in girls who are more or less bohemian, and ambitious beyond their talents, but Rhoda Searle was noteworthy—her face stirred the imagination, she had realised that she would never paint, and the free-and-easy intercourse of the Latin quarter had wholly unfitted her for the prim provincialism to which she must return in England.

"My father was a parson," she told Wendover once, as they smoked cigarettes together after dinner. "I had hard work to convince him that English art schools weren't the apex, but he gave

instinct, for even now that I know I should never make an artist, my horror isn't so much the loss of my hopes as the loss of my freedom, my—my identity; I am never to be natural any more. After I leave here I am to go on suppressing myself till the day I die! Sometimes I shall be able to shut myself up and howl—that's all I've got to look forward to."

"What are you going to do?" asked Wendover, looking sympathetic, and thinking pleasurably that he had found a good character to put into his book.

"I am going back," she said, "a shining example of the folly of being discontented with district-visiting and Church bazaars! I go back a failure for Beckenhampton to moralise over. My old schoolmistress has asked me to stay with her while I 'look round'—you see, I've spent all my money, and I must find a situation. If the Beckenhampton parents don't regard me as too immoral, it is just possible she may employ me in the school to 'teach drawing'—unless I try to teach it. Then I suppose I shall be called a 'revolutionary' and be dismissed." She contemplated the shabby little salon thoughtfully, and lit another cigarette. "From the Boul' Mich' to a boarding school! It'll be a change. I wonder

if it will be safe to smoke there if I keep my bedroom window open wide?"

Yes, it would be as great a change as was conceivable, and Rhoda Searle was the most interesting figure in the house to Wendover. She was going to England in a month's time—there was no reason why she should not go at once, save that she had enough money to postpone the evil day—and during this valedictory month, she and he talked of their "friendship." In the tortuous streets off the boulevard, she introduced him to humble restaurants, where the dinners were sometimes amazingly good at ridiculously low prices. Together they made little excursions, and pretended to scribble or sketch in the woods —looking at each other, however, most of the

thoughts that she might care for him seriously notwithstanding; his experiences had given him no cause to esteem himself dangerous, and the lover who has never received favours is, in practice, always modest, though in aspirations he may be Juanesque. The suitor of quick perceptions has been made by other women, as everybody but the least sophisticated of débutantes knows.

But if he did not dream that he might trouble the peace of Miss Searle, he was perpetually conscious that Miss Searle had disturbed his own. A month's daily companionhsip with a temperament, plus a fascinating face, would be dangerous to any man—to Wendover it was fatal. His thoughts turned no longer to liaisons with duchesses; his work, itself, was secondary to Rhoda Searle. Silly fellow as he appears, the emotions wakened in him were no less genuine than if he had combined all the noble qualities with which he invested the heroes of his books. Besides, most people would appear silly in a description which dealt only with their weaknesses. Wendover loved, and he cursed the tie that prevented his asking the girl to be his wife. How happy he might have been!

He had feared that the last evening would be a melancholy one. But it was gay—the greater part of it was gay, at any rate. As soon as the

door slammed behind them he saw that she had resolved to keep the thought of the morrow's journey in the background, to help him to turn the farewell into a fête. Her laughing caution was unnecessary; her voice, her eyes had given him the cue—her journey was to be undertaken in the distant future, life was delicious, and they were out to enjoy themselves! He had proposed dining at Armenonville—it wasn't the Paris that she had known, but champagne and fashion seemed the right thing to-night; and no fiacre had ever before sped so blithely, never had the Bois been so enchanting, and never had another girl been such joyous company. After dinner, the Ambassadeurs! The programme? They didn't listen to much of it, they were chattering

told him; "thanks so much! I shall be thinking of it at this time to-morrow."

"So shall I," said Wendover.

She took off her hat, and pulled her hair right before the mirror. "Shall you?"

"Will you write to me?"

"Yes, if you'd like me to."

"I'd more than like it—I shall look forward to your letters tremendously."

"There won't be much to say in them."

"They'll be from *you*. . . . I wish you weren't going."

She raised her eyes to him. "Why?" she asked.

Wendover kept silent a moment—it was the hardest thing that he had done in his life. If he answered, "Because I love you," he felt that he would be a cad. Besides, she must know very well that he loved her—what good would it do to tell her so?—doubtless she had repented her question in the moment of putting it! Yes, he would be a cad to confess to her—she would think less of him for it. He would choose the beau rôle—and she would always remember that, when he might have spoilt their last scene together and pained her, he had been strong, heroic!

"We've been such pals," he said. That she mightn't underrate the heroism, he turned aside,

as the noble fellow in books does when he is struggling.

After a pause, she murmured blankly, "It's time I said 'good-night.'"

She went to him and gave him her hand. Her clasp was fervent—it was encouraging to feel that she was grateful! Her gaze held him, and her eyes were wide, dark, troubled; he was sure that she was sorry for him.

"Good-night, my dear," said Wendover, still as brave as the fellow in the books. And when he had watched her go up the stairs—when she had turned again, with that look in her eyes, and turned away—he went back to the salon and was wretched beyond words to tell, for a fool may love as deeply as the wisest.

He did not remain much longer in the boarding-house, its associations hurt him too much. A sandy-haired girl, with no eyelashes and red ears, occupied the seat that had been Rhoda's at the table, and the newcomer's unconcerned possession of it stabbed him at every meal. Having taken precautions against letters for him going astray, he returned to the hotel, and there month after month he plodded at his book, and tried to forget.

Nearly a year had gone by when he stood again on the deck of a Channel boat. He had not spared himself, and the novel was finished, and he was satisfied with it; but he was as much in love as he had been on the morning when he watched a train steam from the gare St. Lazare. As he paced the deck he thought of Rhoda all the time; it excited him that he was going to England, he might chance to see her—he might even run down to Beckenhampton for a day or two? It would make the situation harder to bear afterwards, of course, but——

He looked up "Beckenhampton" in the Railway Guide often during the next few days. The distance between them was marvellously short—the knowledge that an hour and a half's journey could yield her face to him again had a touch of the magical in it. An hour and a half from

Hades to Olympus! The longing fevered him. He threw some things into a bag pellmell one morning, and caught the 10.15.

"The George Hotel!"—and from the hotel he directed the driver to the school. The little town was grey and drear; he pitied her acutely as he gazed about him from the fly. He understood how her spirit must beat itself against the bars, he realised what her arrival must have meant to her; behind one of the windows of this prison she had sat looking back upon her yesterday! How the year must have changed her! he wondered if she still smiled. The fly jolted into the narrow High Street—and he saw her coming out of the post-office.

Yes, she still smiled—the smile that irradiated

"You've finished your book, eh?"

"How did you know?"

"I saw something about it in a paper. And how's Paris? I dream I'm back sometimes."

"Paris is just the same."

"I suppose you never saw anything of the others afterwards—Kitty Owen, or the MacAllister girl?"

"No, I never came across any of them—I was working very hard. Well? Tell me things; what's the news? You're still at the school then?"

"No."

"No? Aren't you? I was on my way there. What are you doing?"

"I'm married."

The blood sank from his cheeks. "Married?"

"I've been married four months."

A woman came between them to post a letter, and he was grateful for the interruption. "Let me congratulate you."

"Thanks. My husband's a solicitor here. . . . You'll come and see us?"

"I'm afraid . . . I should have been delighted, of course, but I have to be in town again this evening."

"We'd better move—we're in everybody's

way," she said. "Will you walk on with me? When does the book come out?"

"In a few weeks' time—I'll send a copy to you."

"Really? It would be very good of you. I've often looked at the book columns to see if it was published."

"Have you? I was afraid you'd forgotten all about me. . . . You—you might have written again; you promised to write!"

"I know."

"Why didn't you?"

"What was the good?"

"It would have made me happier. I missed you frightfully. I—I think that was why I left the pension, I couldn't stand it when you'd gone.

whether you understood. . . . We shan't meet any more, and I should like you to know——"

"Don't," she exclaimed thickly. "For heaven's sake!"

"I must," said Wendover—"I loved you dearly!"

They had walked some yards before she answered; her voice was a whisper: "What's the use of saying that to me now?" The bitterness of suffering was in the words—they flared the truth on him, the annihilating truth.

"My God!" he faltered, "would it have been any use *then?*"

Her face was colourless. She didn't speak.

"Rhoda, did you care? If—if I had asked you to stay with me, would you have stayed?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me."

"Yes, then, I *would* have stayed!" she said hoarsely. "Whom should I have hurt? I was alone, I had no one to study but myself. I wanted you to ask me. Stayed? I'd have thanked God if you had spoken! You were blind, you *wouldn't* see. And now, when it's too late, you come and say it!"

"I wanted to be straight to you," he groaned. "I sacrificed my happiness to be straight to you—it was damnably hard to do."

"I know. But I didn't want sacrifices—I wanted love. . . . Oh, it's no good our talking about it!" She stopped, and sighed. "We shall both get over it, I suppose."

"*Is* it too late?" pleaded Wendover brokenly.

"Quite. Things aren't the same; last year I was free to do as I liked. I have no conventions, but I have a conscience—there's my husband to consider now, and—and more, too. I shouldn't be contented like that to-day—I should have injured others. You and I let our chance slide, and we shall never get it back. . . . Smile, and say something about nothing—there are people who know me coming along."

And he did not sleep at the George after all; in the next train that left for Euston, a grey-

that has been quoted: "Our bitterest remorse is not for our sins, but for our stupidities."

The reception of the novel was most flattering, and as usual the author's "insight into the mind of Woman" has been pronounced "remarkable."

A VERY GOOD THING FOR THE GIRL

BAGOT told us this tale in the Stage Door Club one night. We were sitting round the fire, talking of perfect love, and somebody asked him if he had ever thought of marrying.

"Once," said the comedian cheerfully.

"Couldn't you afford it?" His talent and the remains of his good looks were worth fifty pounds a week to him then, but there had been days—well, listen to Bagot!

"It wasn't that I couldn't afford it," he said with a laugh; "actors never wait till they can afford it. I escaped in a curious way. What

better than I remember yesterday. You see it was my first London engagement, and I had been trying to get one in London for sixteen years. Sixteen years I had been on the road—and seen the amateurs with money sauntering on to the West End stage from their Varsity Club!

"My agent had told me to try my luck at the office over the theatre, one morning in July, and when I went in, there was nobody there but a young man who I guessed must be Pulteney. He was sitting at the table with a pencil in his hand, fiddling with a model of one of the scenes, and looking as worried as if he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer.

" 'Have I the honour of speaking to Mr. Pulteney?' said I. In those days I imagined authors were important persons.

"He flushed, and smiled—rather on the wrong side of his mouth, I thought. 'That's my name.'

" 'I was sent round to see you about the part of the clergyman in your farcical comedy, Mr. Pulteney,' I said. I had really been sent to see the stage-manager, but soft soap is never wasted, and I was always a bit of a diplomatist.

"He asked me to sit down, and we talked. He was smoking a cigarette, and I thought for a moment he was going to offer me one. I suppose it occurred to him that it wouldn't be the right

thing to ask an actor to smoke in the manager's room, for he threw his own cigarette away. He was a gentleman, poor Pulteney, though he was a deuced bad dramatist.

"The manager came bustling back soon, and began to hum and haw, but Pulteney put in a word that made it all right. I was told it was a capital part, and a big chance for me, and I skipped downstairs and out into the street, feeling as puffed-up as if I owned the Strand. As a matter of fact, the salary wasn't much—I had had better money in the provinces—but the thought of making a hit in the West End so excited me that I was nearly popping with pride.

"Great Cumberland Place! wasn't I sold when the part came. You've no idea how duffing it

way, and the more I studied the glummer I felt I had my dinner at Exeter Hall several times and listened to the people giving their orders; it was cheap, and I thought I might hear the sort of tone I was trying to get hold of. But I didn't. On the Sunday I went to three churches and sat through three sermons. Honest Injun! And that was no use. Talk about an R.A.'s difficulty in finding the right model? I spent eight dusty days scouring London for a model for the 'Rev. Simon Tibbits'!

"Then one afternoon I had come out of Prossers' Avenue. As it happened I wasn't thinking shop; I wasn't thinking about anything in particular; and all of a sudden I heard a voice. *A* voice? I heard *the* voice. I heard the voice I needed for the part!

"I jumped. My heart was in my throat. There, smiling up at a six-foot constable, was a little parson asking the way to Baker Street. He looked like an elderly cherub, with his pink cheeks, and his innocent, inquiring eyes. I held my breath in the hope he would go on talking, but the policeman had answered him, and he tripped along with merely a 'Thank you.' He tripped along with the oddest walk I have ever seen; and I dodged after him, never taking my

gaze off his legs and studying them all the way to Charing Cross.

"As I expected, he was going by bus. There was one just moving. Up went his umbrella; and the next moment I was on the step, too, intending to lure him into conversation as soon as I could, and master his voice as nicely as I was mastering his legs.

" 'Full inside,' said the conductor, putting his dirty hand before my face. I was so annoyed I could have punched his head!

"Well, there was nothing for it but to go on top and wait for someone to get out. Hang it, nobody did get out; and I saw no more of my little model till we reached Baker Street. I meant to let him walk a few yards, and then ask

train was there, and he hovered up and down for five minutes or more, looking for a seat to suit him; I began to think we'd both be left behind. Then just as they were slamming the doors, he made up his mind. In he went, and I after him, and—what do you think? We were both on the same side of the compartment, with a fat woman and a soldier between us!

"Two passengers between us, I give you my word, and no room opposite. Not only I couldn't talk to him—I couldn't even see him. Every time we drew into a station I prayed the compartment would thin a bit; I sat tense, watching the faces. Not a sign on them! You've heard of the American rustic who got so exasperated standing up in a crowded car, that at last he shouted, 'Say! ain't none o' you people got homes?' That was how *I* felt."

Bagot's imitation of the rustic was very good, and we signified our appreciation in the usual way. When the laugh was over someone told the waiter we were thirsty, and the story-teller filled his pipe.

"Well," he resumed, puffing, "to cut a long journey short, we reached Rickmansworth without my having had a glimpse of my gentleman. I was about desperate now. He hadn't taken a dozen steps when I overtook him, and asked if

he would be kind enough to inform me whether any decent apartments were to be had in the village. It didn't seem worth while to have had all this bother just to hear him speak again for ten seconds, and I was wishing myself back in my apartments in Kennington. I said the first thing that came into my head.

"It turned out to be the best question I could have put.

"I am a visitor myself," he said, beaming at me, "but I believe there are rooms to be had in Cornstalk Terrace. Yes, I am almost positive I noticed a card in a window as I passed through the street this morning."

"I stood simply lapping his voice up.

" 'Is it difficult for a stranger to find?' I asked.

mansworth isn't the sprightliest place I've ever waited in either. I had some nourishment in the bar of the hotel across the way, and I examined the High Street. It wasn't extensive. The barmaid had told me there was a park close by, so I started to discover it. I wasn't keen on the park, you understand, but I thought it would be a nice quiet spot to rehearse in and see if I had caught the little cleric's voice. As I was going along, past a row of villas, blest if I didn't come across him again, standing at his gate!

"He supposed I had been hunting for lodgings all the time, so, of course, I had to keep the game up. He was a friendly old chap and, honour bright, I felt sorry to think I was going to turn him into ridicule on the stage. Still he would never know, and actors can't be choosers. He went inside to ask his landlady if she could recommend any diggings to me; and a minute afterwards, out he fluttered to say he had quite forgotten there would be a couple of rooms vacant in that very house next day. Christopher Columbus! I had had no more idea of taking rooms than I had of taking the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. But it was too gigantic a chance to miss. I fixed the matter with the old woman there and then—and the next morning my model and I were living under the same roof! . . . Pass the

matches, one of you fellows, my pipe's out. . . .

"At the back of the house there were some lettuces and a clothes-prop that were called a 'garden.' My parlour was at the back, too; and after dinner I saw the rector airing himself. By now I had learnt he was a rector. I lost no time in joining him, you may be sure—I wasn't paying two rents to go to sleep on the sofa—and we discussed politics and public libraries. It was a bit heavy for me, but I didn't worry much what he talked about so long as I could hear his dulcet tones. I ought to have said there was a bench against the clothes-prop; so far as her means permitted, the old woman did things handsomely.

"There was a bench, and we sat down on it; and while we were sitting there, the door opened

there was room for three on the bench. She sat by me, turning a backyard into paradise—I mean the girl, not the old woman—and I forgot to study her father for half an hour. I heard where his living was, and why they were taking a holiday, and I stammered that I was an actor, and was afraid they'd be shocked. I was stupid to own it, though it was all right and they didn't mind; but there was something in that girl's eyes that forced the truth from you in spite of yourself. I had been going to say I was in the City, but the lie stuck.

"There's some fine country round Rickmansworth—'Ricky,' the natives call it—and we used to explore, the three of us. We'd go to Chorley Wood, and to Chenies—what a good back cloth Chenies would make! By the end of the week we were together nearly all the day. They invited me into their room to supper, and after supper Marion would sing at a decrepit piano. The meals were quite plain, you know—sometimes we'd pick the green stuff in the garden ourselves—but, boys, the peace of that little village room in the lamplight! The minister and his child—the simple, God-fearing man and that girl with her deep, grave eyes, and earnest voice. Their devotion to each other, the homeliness of it all! To me, a touring player, it was sweet, it was

wonderful, to be welcomed in an atmosphere of home.

"If the comedy had been put into rehearsal on the date arranged it would have been better for me. But it wasn't—the rehearsals were postponed—and soon I was thinking much more of Marion than of my part. I used to talk to her of—well, of things I had never talked of to anyone except my mother when I was a kid. Somehow I didn't feel ashamed to talk of them to that girl. She took me out of myself. She raised me up. The footlights were forgotten.

"Oh, I had no right to think of her in the way I did, of course! What could I hope for? There was a world between us, and I saw it. I told myself that I had done all I came to do, and

But we looked sympathetic, and let him work it up.

"One day she owned she cared for me," he continued, with a far-away air. "It was the day before they were going home, and we were talking of our 'friendship.' Somehow I—I lost my head, and she was crying in my arms.

"I asked her to marry me. I swore she should never repent it. She sat listening to me with her hands limp in her lap, and a look on her face that I shall see till I die. She was afraid—not of me, but that her father wouldn't consent. They had no violent prejudice against the theatre, but she had never been to one in her life; for her to marry an actor seemed an impossible thing.

"I went to him right off. I told him I worshipped her; I implored him to trust her to me. It was an awful shock to him; I don't believe he had had a suspicion of the state of affairs—he reproached himself for letting it come about. But he was very gentle. He said he had hoped for a far different future for her, still that all he wanted was for his child to be happy; he said he couldn't stand in her way if he knew she was really sure of herself. In the end he promised she should marry me if she wanted to in three years' time.

"When I parted from her we considered we

were engaged; and in the evening, after they left, I went to town.

"I went to town, and there was a call for the first rehearsal of *Touch and Go*. I had forgotten business, I had forgotten everything but Marion. That call paralysed me. I saw what I had done, I realised the situation. The girl I was to marry reverenced her father—and I meant to burlesque him on the stage!

"I couldn't do it, I wouldn't! How could I think of it now? It wasn't that I feared their finding it out—as I tell you, they weren't playgoers, and their home was a good way off besides—it was the heartlessness of the thing that frightened me. To make myself up as her father? To speak the bland, hypocritical lines of the part in her father's voice, to mimic him, to turn him into

teney nearly twisted his moustache out during my scenes. If an author has written a bad part, trust him to blame the actor! He button-holed me at last, and begged me 'to put a little more character into it.' And I tried to. But I knew it was a failure, for I could only see one character all the time—and that one I wouldn't touch.

"When I was in the stalls once, he and the manager sat down and put their heads together. It was dark in front, and they hadn't seen me as they came round. I heard them say something about 'a pity they hadn't a West End actor for the part.' I knew they were talking of *my* part, and it got my dander up; I knew I could act any of that West End hoity-toity company off the stage; I knew I had only to let myself go.

"When I went on again I determined I'd show 'em what I could do; I determined I'd show 'em they had a better comedian than any forty-pound -a-weeker. I sent them into fits. 'Hallo!' they said. The women in the wings stopped talking about their dresses to watch me. The highly connected amateurs from Oxford and Cambridge began to give at the knees, and I could hear the leading man's heart drop on to the boards; the actor from the provinces was wiping them out! That rehearsal was the sweetest triumph of my life.

"She'd never know—she'd never know! I kept telling myself she couldn't hear of it. By the time the wig that I ordered was tried on I felt as sure of success as I was of my lines! I was soaked in the part. I wasn't *acting* the little rector—by George, I *was* the little rector, trip, face and chirrup. And the first night came, and I was to play in London at last!

"They told me the house was crammed. All the swell critics were there, all the fashionable first-nighters. I was so nervous that the wig-paste shook in my hands when I made up, but I was ready much too soon.

"I went downstairs and waited. The door-keeper gave me a note. Of all the——! It was from Marion. A friend had brought her up to

thing I had been trying to hold back, had escaped me. The laugh went to my head—I made them laugh again! I said I'd explain to Marion —that she'd understand, that she'd forgive me—and even while I said it, my other self, the 'self' that wasn't acting, knew it was a lie and I was losing her.

"I couldn't help it—the laughter made me drunk; I did it all! I knew the disgust she must be feeling, but the audience were roaring at me now; I felt the shame that she was suffering with my own heart, but the artist in me swept me on. The manager panted at me in the wings: 'You're great—you're immense. Gad! you're making the hit of the piece!' The stalls were in convulsions, the gallery had got my name. *'Bagot!'* they were shouting—after each act, *'Bagot!'* Pulteney rushed to me with blessings at the end. The house thundered for me. It was London! I knew that I was 'made'! But across the flare of grinning faces, I seemed to see the Angel I had lost and the horror in her eyes."

Bagot bowed his head; his pipe had fallen, tears dripped down his cheeks. By this time he was quite sure he had been mourning for her ever since beside a lonely hearth.

"She wrote to me next day, breaking it off,"

he groaned. "She wouldn't listen to reason; she said it 'might be art, but it wasn't love.' "

"Did you ever see her afterwards?" we asked.

"Once," he said, "years later. She married some County chap, with an estate and all that. I saw her driving with her little boy. She looked very happy I thought. Women soon forget." After a pause he added bitterly: "If one of you fellows"—he glanced at the only author in the group—"cares to write the true tragedy of a man's life, there it is. You might call it 'The Price of Success.' "

But we all thought a more appropriate title would be the one that I have used.

THE WOMAN WHO WISHED TO DIE

My meeting with Mr. Peters was so momentous that I can't resist mentioning it was due to someone I had never seen—to a trifle; I can't resist referring to my own affairs for a moment. I was supposed to be at work on a novel, and I had a mind as fertile as mashed potato. One day in August I tumbled a receipt out of a desk, and saw that the lady to whom I sent my stories to be typewritten had had nothing from me to typewrite for two months. The discovery dismayed me. I was ashamed to realise how slowly I was getting on, and resolved to try a change of surroundings. My trip altered the course of lives—and I shouldn't have made it but for the reproach of a stranger's receipt.

I decided upon Ostend, by way of Antwerp, where I wanted to see the pictures; also I meant to visit Brussels, where I wanted to see my prettiest cousin. And in Antwerp—behold Mr. Peters! As I was wandering through the gallery, an American asked me if I could tell him in which of the rooms he would find "The Last Communion of St. Francis of Assisi." Having just been

directed to it myself—just been startled by the faultless fluency of an official's English—I had the information pat, and the American and I proceeded to the room together.

I remember feeling it incumbent on me to be pained by the first words he spoke in front of the picture.

"I am told," he remarked, "that Rubens sold this work for sixty pounds, English money, and that forty thousand pounds were subsequently paid for it. Rough on Rubens!"

I affected the tone of the Superior Person. "You would see it better if you stood further away," I said; "what do you think of the painting?"

"Of the painting," he answered, "I am no

We went down the steps of the Musée des Beaux Arts side by side, and strolled through the hot streets, among the swarm of ragged Flemish children—there are more ragged children to the square yard in Antwerp than in Westbourne Park—to the quarter of the hotels. It turned out that we were staying at the same one, he on the first floor and I on the fifth, and after dinner we drifted together to the place Verte, and talked there under the trees while the band played.

He told me that he had not been to Europe before, and I discerned that he was a lonely man persevering with the effort to enjoy himself.

"The fact is," he said, handing me his cigar-case, "I ought to have made the trip some years ago.—Won't you try a cigar, sir?—There's nothing the matter with Europe, but I guess I'm not quite so keen on sight-seeing as I was. When I was a lad I was dead-stuck on coming over, but I hadn't the dollars then. I promised myself to have a good time when I was thirty, and I hustled. When I was thirty I had made a few dollars, but I saw no chance of the good time—I was still hustling. One afternoon it occurred to me that I was forty. It displeased me *some;* seemed to me that good time was never coming. At the start I had aimed to be the boss of a business, but now the business had got so big it was

bossing me. 'Well,' I said, 'you have made your pile, and you have nobody to spend it on but yourself; next year you shall quit, and have that good time you have been working for so long.' But it didn't come off. The business went on swelling, and I went on saying, 'Next year.' And before I knew where I was I was fifty, and"—his voice dropped a little—"and I have never had the good time yet."

He was leaving for Ostend the next morning, and, when we parted, I was sorry he wasn't to remain in Antwerp till the end of the week like myself. However, at Ostend I expected we should meet again, for I did not mean to stay long in Brussels. It is a beautiful city, and many of us would admire it much more if it did not set

last when I did reach Ostend I had almost forgotten Mr. Peters.

The thought of him recurred to me as I made my way towards the Kursaal on the first evening, and I wondered if he was still here. It was eight o'clock, and now that the glare of sun upon the blistered Digue had faded, and the radiance of electricity had risen in its stead, the town was looking its best. Ostend was still dining. The long continuous line of hotel windows fronting the sea was brilliant. Window after window, wide, curtainless, and open to the view. A frontage of gleaming tables and coloured candle-shades—a dazzling frontage of flowers, and faces, and women's jewelled necks and arms.

In the Kursaal the orchestra was playing "L'Amico Fritz." I had listened to the music for perhaps half an hour when I saw Mr. Peters. He was with a friend, and he passed without observing me. They sat down a short distance off and I noticed that he was talking with much animation to her, with much more animation than he had shown with me. Indeed, I think that was what I noticed first of all—the unexpected animation of Mr. Peters.

But the next instant I was engrossed by his companion. She was not youthful; I didn't consider her pretty; her dress, rich as it was, ap-

peared to me a dowdy sort of thing among the elaborate toilettes around us. Then what engrossed me? Well, it was the expression that she wore. I am trying to find the word. "Pleasure," of course—but that says nothing. As nearly as I can explain, it was the wonder in her look. The "wonder," that is it! There were crow's-feet about her eyes, and her gaze shone with a young girl's wonder.

Evidently the interest in the conversation was mutual, and I assumed that they had known each other in the States. Then a second time they passed me, and I heard her speak, and she had no trace of the American accent. It began to seem to me that Mr. Peters had been losing no time at Ostend.

ed his cigar-case to me: "Won't you try a cigar, sir?—but I am getting along."

I used to wish he would present me to her, but he never did. Constantly those two figures sat together in the Kursaal. In the concert-room, or on the terrace, if I found the little woman I found Mr. Peters. Never to my knowledge did she speak to anybody else. And always the girlishness of her gaze held and mystified me—always, that is to say, until the end was approaching.

Of course, I didn't know that it threatened the end then, but I couldn't fail to preceive the difference. The curiosity she had inspired in me was so strong, I had watched her so intently for nearly a fortnight—oh, it may sound vulgar; I don't defend myself—that the first time I glanced across at her face and saw trouble there I was sensible of a distinct shock. And in the next few days I said it was heavy trouble. It was as if the blaze within her were dwindling, as if it were dying out, and leaving her cold and grey. I said—it is a great word, but once I said the look on her face was "terror."

I did not attach any importance to the fact that Mr. Peters was sitting alone on the terrace when I went to the Kursaal one evening, because I supposed that he was waiting there for her to

come in; it was when I found him alone in the same place much later that I was surprised. You know how you understand sometimes, without a gesture, that a man wants you to sit down by him, but doesn't want you to speak; I knew that Mr. Peters wanted me to sit down by him, and didn't want me to speak. I think we must have sat looking at the track of moonlight on the sea for a quarter of an hour before either of us said a word.

Then he remarked drily, "My friend has gone."

"You must miss her," I responded.

He mused again, and handed his cigar-case to me with his usual question. I said I would have a cigarette.

just broken me up. As a writer you may find it worth your attention. It was because she had always been solitary; that was what started the trouble—her loneliness. It's an awful thing to conjecture how many poor little women in London are breaking their hearts with loneliness. Never a companion she had, never a pleasure. Mornings she walked to her employment; evenings she walked back to where she lodged. She was a girl of eighteen then, and she walked cheerfully. And she was cheerful when she was twenty, and twenty-five, and thirty—always keeping her pluck up with the thought of something brighter ahead, you know; always hoping, like me, for that 'good time.' "

"Go on," I said.

"When she had been clerking years, and doing home work in her leisure, she had put a small sum by. But she was frightened to touch it—there was the growing fear of the lonely woman that one day she might take sick and need that money. And the 'good time' didn't come. And her youth went out of her, and lines began to creep about her eyes and mouth—she looked in the glass and saw them—and she didn't walk to and from quite so bravely now. Twenty years odd she had had of drudgery, and the hopefulness was dying in her. She was just faint with longing, sir. She

wanted to put on pretty things before she was old —she was starving for a taste of the sweets that she was meant for."

He blew a circlet of smoke into the air, and watched it.

"That stage passed. Seemed to the woman, as time dragged on, that she hadn't the energy left to long for anything. She was tired. When she lay down to sleep she wasn't particularly keen on waking up any more. As I see the matter, it was by no means the work that had done the damage—it was the dullness. It was the emptiness of her life, the forlornness of it. By-and-by she had to go to a doctor, and he talked about 'depression' and 'melancholia.' He said what she ought to do was to live with friends—

for Europe in the morning; I told him it would do him good to hustle round the stores, buying most things he needed to put on, after he arrived. I guess my arguments weren't so excellent as my intentions—when I went down town after breakfast I heard he had shot himself. Melancholia's likely to be serious. . . . No, the doctor's advice wasn't much use to the little woman. Her walk to the office lay across some bridge. One evening, as she was crossing it, the thought came that it would be sweet if she were lying in the river and heard the water singing in her ears. Then she tore herself away because she had turned giddy. Every morning and evening she had to cross that bridge, you understand me. Every morning and evening that thought pulled at her, and she stopped by the parapet and looked down."

In the pause he made, the music from the concert-room was painfully distinct. They were playing the "Invitation to the Valse."

"Well, just as with the friend I lost in Buffalo," he went on quietly, "while she did her work like a machine all day, she was proposing to die. She had grown so woeful tired that it was a relief to her to think of dying. . . . You will smile at what I am going to say. One afternoon she saw an ordinary picture advertisement stuck on

a wall—a picture of a Continental resort, with fashionable ladies parading on the Digue. She told me that—with the thought of death great in her mind—she stood right there in the London street, looking at it; and, sir, her regret was that she was going out of the world without once having worn a pretty frock, or bought a handful of roses in December! You may laugh at the idea of a commonplace poster influencing a woman at such a time?"

"I am not laughing," I said.

"She harped on that grievance of hers till some of the interests of her girlhood stirred in her again. The enthusiasm had gone, but she was wistful. And she'd sit thinking. She'd sit looking at her savings-book—all she had to show for

self. She felt that she had entered the store too late to wear the things she had hankered for so long. She came here the day after I arrived. She appeared a sad little body, sitting next to me at table; perhaps that was why I took to her so; but now it just amazes me to think of the way she livened up when we had grown friends. I have heard her laugh, sir! I have heard her laugh quite happily, though her cash was melting like an ice-cream in an oven; though she had come to tremble each time she changed a gold piece; though she had come to shudder at each sunset that brought her nearer to the End. It was only this afternoon that she told me the circumstances! I had seen she had anxiety, and I—asked questions. I looked to meet her again this evening, but I got a letter instead to say I should never meet her any more. When they handed me her letter she had—gone."

"You don't mean she—she's dead?" I whispered.

"Not yet," he said. "She wrote that our friendship had helped her some; she wrote that she was going back to her old lodging, and would struggle on. But she resigned her position, and she has changed her last bank-note—how long do you surmise that she will have the heart to struggle?"

He lit another cigar; and among the jewelled, exotic crowd we stared absently over the rail at the humble flock of weary trippers who lacked the shillings to come in. One may do worse than cross to Ostend merely to stand by that slender rail and watch the two worlds that it divides.

At last I said: "She must have liked you very much: her feelings for you made her want to live —and then, to remain here with you, she squandered the money that she needed to keep her alive!"

"It makes me feel good to hear you say so," he returned. "It is not encouraging that she has disappeared, knowing that she had never mentioned even the quarter where she lodged; but it would be the proudest moment of my life if tha

"If she's hunting for a situation she'll look at the newspapers," I said.

"She will look at the columns that interest her," he answered, "but I mayn't advertise on every page."

"You can pay for inquiries."

"You may bet I'll pay; all that worries me is that inquiries go slow."

"I suppose you don't know which bridge it is she crosses every day?"

"We can build no hopes on the bridge," he replied; "I did not interrogate her—I did not suspect it was to be our last meeting."

"She may struggle longer than you think; she may be brave."

"You mean it kindly," he said, "but you have heard her history! I opine that I've got to discover that address within a week—I am racing against time. There's just this in my favour, she has a name to be noticed. She's called 'Joanna Faed,' and I guess there can't be many women called that, even in a city the size of London."

"What an extraordinary thing!" I faltered. "I can give you 'Joanna Faed's' address on half a hundred receipts. Why, she must be the lady who typewrites my stories for me!"

FRANKENSTEIN II

I was at the Throne Theatre to see Orland Lightfoot's comedy. Entering the buffet, in th first interval, I met Orlando Lightfoot.

"Hallo, old man!" I said. "Congratulation in large quantities."

"Thanks," said the new dramatist. "Hav you seen it before?"

"No; but I saw in the papers that it was a 'emphatic success.' How beautiful Elsie Milla is in the part!"

We induced one of the personages behind th bar to notice that we were present, and remove

destroying me. Before I created this accursed comedy I was a happy man."

"It must have been a very long while before," I said. "When I had the misfortune to share your rooms, you used to remark casually at breakfast that you wished you were dead."

"Anyone is liable to express dissatisfaction in moments; but on the whole I was cheerful and buoyant, especially when you were out," he insisted. "I frequently had as much as five pounds at the time. I'm not boasting; you know it's true. Five pounds at the time is prosperity, if a fellow hasn't got a monster to support. Since I wrote the comedy, a five-pound note has been as ephemeral as a postage stamp. I pinched and pawned to start the monster in life. What it cost me in typewriting alone would have kept me for a month. It has gorged gold. It has devoured my All. And now, by a culminating stroke of diabolical malice, it's breaking my heart."

"There's nearly a quarter of an hour before the act," I said. "Give me a cigarette and the story—I want one badly; an appreciative editor is eager to send a cheque."

"Halves?" asked the author of the "emphatic success."

"Halves," I agreed.

said Orlando, "the devil tempted me
t of the Vaudeville one night. Elsie
as in the cast; she had very little to do,
sual, she did it exquisitely. I had al-
mired her, wished I knew her, and that
thought, 'By Jove, wouldn't I like to
big part for her! Wouldn't she make a
e only got the chance!' I came out after
formance imagining her in the sort of
e's playing in the monster. A plot was
ing to put its head round the corner, and
dered out of the Strand on to the Embank-
trying to get hold of it. The Embank-
was deserted, and the river——"

es," I said. "Cut that kind of thing—I can
t in when I do the writing. I don't want to
any of the second act."

Well, I went to bed about three o'clock with
ot that enraptured me. When I woke up and
light it didn't look quite so fetch-
till it had

ought to have been turning out stuff for the papers, but I let them slide, and at last the play was finished. It sounds as rapid as filling your pipe, told like this; when you do the story you should stress the alternate ups and downs of the business: the nights when I wrote epigrams and felt like Pinero, and the mornings when I read 'em and felt like cutting my throat. Don't forget that. It's real."

"I'll remember," I said. "I'll have a paragraph on it."

"Well, I had two copies of the thing typewritten at Miss Beck's, in Rupert Street; and pretty they were, tied up with pink bows—till I put in all the improvements I had thought of after I posted to her. The improvements I had thought of after I posted to her made such a mess of the copies that I had to have two more typewritten. However, I couldn't pretend she was dear, and I paid and looked pleasant. Guilelessly, I imagined my expenses were over.

"Sonny, they were just beginning! Miss Beck's bill was only the preface. A man who knew the ropes told me I should be a fool to have the scrip hawked about before it had been copyrighted. 'How do you do it?' I said. 'Oh,' he said, 'it's very easy. You give a private performance of the piece in a building licensed for public

entertainments. There are a few details to b observed.' When I grasped the details I knew I had committed a reckless extravagance in writing a play. I examined my belongings, and doubted if they would run to luxuries like this. Still I had constructed the monster, and it had its claims. I did my duty by it.

"I hired a hall in Walthamstow for an afternoon. I invented two columns of Fashions for Men to pay for the hall in Walthamstow. Whipping a tired brain, I invented them—and then they fetched eighteenpence short of the rent. I posted one of the nice, clean copies of the monster to the Lord Chamberlain to read. *I* didn't want him to read it—especially since I had learnt the compliment was to cost me guineas—but that was one of the 'details to be observed.' I had to

ed, and don't forget to register your title.' Well, I won't dwell on the drinks, but by the time I was through with the Walthamstow hall, and Stationers' Hall, the monster had left nothing in my wardrobe except a mackintosh, and had consumed a complete set of Thackeray bound in calf!"

Orlando groaned again, and I murmured sympathy. I also reminded him that the second act must be drawing near.

"All right!" he said testily. "Listen. The monster was now my legal property—it was about the only property I did have now, but anyhow, the monster was mine. I was informed that an official licence for it would reach me in due course. Admire my next move! An average intellect might have been shattered by the sacrifices I had made for the beast; *I* was still brilliant. Did I send the thing to a theatre uninvited and wait six months to see it expelled? Not Orlando! I realised that I was an outsider. I realised that I needed someone to take me in. Elsie Millar was playing at the St. James's then. She had never heard of me, but I wrote to her; I said I had written a comedy with her in my mind, and that I'd like her to read it before I offered it to a management."

"What for?"

"'What for'? Because I thought she might be so enamoured of her part that she'd move mountains to get the piece produced."

"My prolix friend," I said, "I perfectly understand your inward reason; but what was the reason you gave to the lady?"

"Oh!" said Orlando, "I borrowed from a letter that I once knew an actress receive from a full-blown dramatist; I wrote that I was 'desirous of hearing whether she would care to play the part if an opportunity arose.' Suggestive?"

"For an amateur who had never been through a stage-door it was consummate impudence," I admitted. "And she replied?"

"She replied that she would be pleased to read the piece if I sent it to her private address. It

wrote that she had read my comedy and was 'delighted with it.' Look here! if you don't undertake not to speak another word till I've finished, I shan't tell you any more. Is it understood?"

I nodded. And for a spell Orlando had it all his own way.

"She wrote that she was 'delighted with it,' and asked me to call on her one day about half-past four. I could hardly believe my eyes. Really, it looked as if the monster's rancour had worn itself out. I felt tender towards the beast again, my affection revived. I said that it was like a monster in a fairy tale, transformed to a benevolent presence by the heroine. I thought that a pretty idea; I hoped I should get a chance to mention it to Miss Millar when I went.

"Of course, I meant to go the next afternoon—weather permitting—and I was so eager to see what sort of weather it was in the morning that I trembled when I pulled up the blind. Thank Heaven! it was raining. I breakfasted gratefully, and my only fear was that the sun might come out later on. Fortunately it didn't. The drizzle continued, and all was well. By your idiotic expression it's evident you've forgotten that the only decent garment remaining to me was a mackintosh. My suit was socially im-

possible; if it had been a fine day I couldn't have gone.

"She lives with her mother in a top flat in Chelsea. When I was shown in, she was alone. Her voice was just as sweet as it was on the stage. She isn't a bit like any other actress I've met; she talks rather slowly, and she's very quiet. Even when she enthused about the piece she spoke quietly.

" 'I think it's beautiful,' she said. 'I'm glad I asked you to let me read it. I nearly didn't, because——'

" 'Because you didn't know my name?' I said.

" 'Well, yes,' she said. 'So many people write to one, and their pieces are generally so impossible. Is this your first, Mr. Lightfoot?'

rader. She said she wished she had a theatre to produce the thing, and *I* said I wished I had an agent to place it for me. She asked me if I'd like her to show it to Alexander, and *I* said the English language would be inadequate to express the gratitude I'd feel. Of course, I added, she mustn't do all that for nothing, and *she* said she'd find it reward enough to play the part. I said 'Pickles!' then, quite naturally, because she was an exceedingly nice girl, and I liked her. I told her she should have any share of the fees she chose to ask for. 'Oh, nonsense!' she said. 'No, it isn't nonsense!' I said; 'it's only fair.' 'Oh, well, then,' she said, 'if I get the piece done for you anywhere, you shall give me the usual agent's commission. Does *that* satisfy you?' We were talking quite chummily by this time. And I had another cup of tea.

"Before I went, her mother came in. Her mother didn't treat the commission so airily—her mother wanted the girl to have a contract. But that was all right; I put it on paper for her when I got home.

"There was nothing for me to see her about again for two or three months. I had heard from her that Alexander had no use for the piece, and that 'Sir Charles Wyndham had promised to read it on Sunday.' Then she wrote that she was

going on tour—and I called to say good-bye to her. There wasn't a cloud in the heavens, and I was still dependent on the mackintosh, but it couldn't be helped. I stayed longer that time. I could have stayed to supper if it hadn't been for the mackintosh!

"Of course she went on working at the business while she was away, and she used to write me what she was doing about it. She was a regular trump, and I liked getting her letters and answering them, though the prospects never came to anything. At last she wrote that she was coming back—and I called to say 'how do you do' to her. It still hadn't run to a new suit, and—I attribute a great deal to that mackintosh! it curtailed all my visits, I haven't had a fair chance with the girl.

Klondyke, there came this offer for the piece from Cameron, who had just taken the Throne. She was as excited about it as *I* was.

" 'The Throne isn't quite the house I'd have chosen,' she said, 'but you'll get a beautiful cast; Cameron will take pains with the smallest detail, you'll be pleased with everything—— Oh! I mustn't answer for your leading lady.'

"I laughed. There was no need for me to tell her I had faith in my leading lady.

" 'You have given me a chance!' she said. 'It'll be the best part I ever played. If this engagement makes me, I shall owe it to *you*.' There was one of the things without any grease paint on 'em. Wasn't it sweet? She'd have had every excuse for reminding me all the time what a service she had done me.

"We talked it over like pals. She said that, of course, Cameron would play the Colonel himself, and that he wanted to get Fairfax for the lover.

" 'Who's Fairfax?' I said; 'I don't know him. The lover is an important part—all that pretty scene of yours in the Orchard Act will go for nothing if your lover's not good.'

" 'Oh, Fairfax is a very clever young actor!' she said; 'we've never played together, but he has

just made a great hit at the Imperial; I saw hi
there; he was very good indeed.'

"Well, things couldn't have looked more prom
ising. Cameron was enthusiastic—he didn't pa
any money on account, but he gave me a cigar—
the percentage he agreed to was satisfactory, an
the girl I loved considered me her benefacto
Making a discount for disappointment, I hope
for a hundred a week from the Throne; beside
that, there'd be the provincial tours, and ther
were the American and Colonial rights. I ha
visions of a house in Sloane Street, and a moto
car.

"Then the expenses began again. I couldn
attend daily rehearsals through August in th
mackintosh, so I managed to raise a pony on th

ments upset my calculations. I always had to adjourn with Cameron—though I'd rather have taken Miss Millar—and Cameron lunched extensively. If a man stands you Bollinger one day, you can't offer him Bass the next. I had expected to enjoy the rehearsals, but the eighteen pounds were vanishing at such a rate that I thanked Providence when the last week came.

"Well, by dint of missing a rehearsal or two, I had contrived to cling to a fiver; and I shook hands with myself. I counted on it to keep me going till I got the first fees. Vain dream! They decided to 'try the piece' in Worthing for three nights—and I had to pay fares and an hotel bill! Old chap, when I walked here to the Throne, on the night of the London production, I possessed one shilling—and that went on a drink for the acting manager. In the morning I hadn't the means to buy newspapers with the notices of my own play. Penniless, I read them in a public library among the Unemployed!

"Of course, the notices bucked me up. With an 'emphatic success,' I could smile at being stone-broke till the hundred a week came in. But it didn't come. The box-office sheets gave me the cold shivers when I saw them, and the queues at the pit and gallery doors were so short that the 'niggers' gave up playing outside. The piece

always went very well, but there was never any money in the house; the audience always looked very nice, but none of them had ever paid. They look very nice this evening, don't they? Paper! Paper in rows! Paper in reams!

"A hundred a week? By the first Saturday night I reckoned my week's royalties would about cover the cost of my Worthing trip! And *then* I was optimistic.

"Cameron sent for me; he said:

" 'I'm afraid I must take this piece off at once.'

"The dressing-room reeled. I muttered that the notices had been good.

" 'It's more than the business is. Look at the booking!' he said.

other talk after the show. You won't mind my bolting now? The bell rang ever so long ago; the second act must be half over."

"A curse upon the second act!" he burst out. "Why did I ever write the second act? Don't see it!"

"But I must see it," I urged. "I want to see it. What's the matter with it?"

The dramatist was silent again; I saw that he was struggling with strong emotion. At last he said in a low voice:

"The rest of the story—so far as it has gone—is more painful still. Perhaps you suppose that, now it had stripped me of all and involved me in the meshes of a money-lender, the monster's malignity was appeased? Not so! Pecuniarily it could harm me no more, but through my affections I was still vulnerable; the monster's most insidious injury you've yet to hear.

"I noticed during the rehearsals that Fairfax was struck with Miss Millar; and lately Miss Millar has shown an unaccountable interest in the big-headed Fairfax. I call it 'unaccountable' because Fairfax, in his proper person, can't be said to account for it. She's always saying how 'tender he is in the part.' The *part's* tender! I own the man can act, but *I* gave him the lines

to speak! *I* invented the tender things for him to do. She doesn't remember that.

"Consider what happened when I wrote the piece! I imagined a charming girl in an orchard; I imagined myself in love with her. She had Elsie Millar's face; she answered me with Elsie Millar's voice. With all the tenderness, all the wit, all the fancy I could command I tried to make this charming girl fond of me. Materially, I was producing half a dozen pages of dialogue; psychologically, I was lending my own character to any man who played the lover's part.

"It fell to Fairfax—and it's all 'Fairfax' with her. Oh, she has been very sympathetic about my failure, we're still friends, but—there's another man now! She talks more of his perform-

An attendant entered the buffet with a note: "Mr. Lightfoot, sir?"

Orlando tore it open—and passed it to me mutely. I read:

"DEAR MR. LIGHTFOOT,—I hear you are in front to-night. I've been waiting to tell you something all the week. Mr. Fairfax and I are engaged to be married—and we owe our happiness to your play. Will you come round afterwards to let us thank you?—Yours always sincerely, "ELSIE MILLAR."

"Poor devil!" I exclaimed. . . . "Well, the monster has finished with you now, at any rate! You know that you're disappointed in love, and you know that the last of the expenses is over."

"Y-e-s," he said. . . . "You think your editor *will* send a cheque for the story?"

"In overdue course," I told him. "Why?"

"Well," he moaned, "how am I to find the money to buy her a wedding present?"

THE TALE THAT WOULDN'T DO

"I CAN tell what's the matter with *you,*" said the Bachelor Girl. "You've got a story to write!"

I had merely shaken hands with her, put down my hat, and chosen a chair by the fire; so I was surprised.

"My dear Sherlock Holmes!" I exclaimed, "this is wonderful. Accustomed as I am to your offensive society, I must own that I fail to see——"

"Nothing could be plainer, my poor Watson,"

If she didn't laugh at orange blossoms, you might approve her.

"Well, it's quite true," I answered; "I *have* a story to write—or, rather, I haven't a story, and I'm obliged to write one. I want to find a story about love; something piquant and yet tender, with——"

"Egyptian or American?" she asked sharply, passing the cigarettes.

"American," I said, "but it won't prevent my going on. Something piquant and yet tender, with a note of pathos, and a vein of sentiment, and——"

"Columns of drivel!" she put in. "What do you mean by coming here on a wet day and babbling about sentiment? Don't you know how ill it always makes me? Now, never mind your story; be a good fellow and cheer me up; I haven't met a man for a month."

"*I'm* not a 'man'—I'm married," I mentioned.

"And don't talk to me as if I were a Chiffon Girl, or we shall fall out. Think I want you to flirt with me?"

"I have no illusions left. Besides, I don't believe you could manage to flirt. Did you ever try?"

"Once."

"You don't say so! Was it a success?"

"Tremendous." She nodded. "Biggest joke you ever heard."

"Really?" I said. "Don't get up to make the tea, then. Keep where you are, and tell me about it."

So she crossed her feet on the fender and told me.

"There was somebody I knew," she said—"Bob. That wasn't his name really, but——"

"We can let him go at 'Bob,'" I agreed; "there's no need to give him away."

"I was only a kid—about nineteen—just beginning to paint. You wouldn't have known me in those days; I was 'utter'—intensely 'utter'—to look at; I used to flop, like the Burne-Jones things; I wore *garments,* and my hair *so!*" She showed me her comedy face, one of the "four

Present for a Good Child.' Don't run away with the idea that I was sentimental about him; we were chums. He used to say the reason he took to me was that I wasn't silly like a girl; he used to say I was the best pal he had. He was only two or three and twenty—younger than *I* was, in some ways. . . . The poker's *your* side—stir the fire!

"Yes, we were awfully good pals for years. When he went to work in Paris—did I tell you he was an artist?—when he went to work in Paris, I could have howled with loneliness. I *was* so dull! I didn't seem to have anybody to say my best things to. Have you ever missed anyone like that? Something funny would come into my mind, and I'd wish I could say it to him; I'd think, 'Wouldn't it be lovely to be saying it to Dick!' Don't you know the feeling? I don't think I was ever so near to howling as when I'd thought of something funny. . . . I hope you do understand that I wasn't sentimental? If you fancy I felt anything but friendship for him, I shan't tell you any more."

"I understand perfectly," I said.

"Of course, we wrote to each other. But I was never good at letters—and, anyhow, what's the use of saying funny things if you can't hear the man laugh? He was away about a year. He

had meant to stay for two or three, but one day he wrote that he was coming home sooner than he had expected. He turned up the next afternoon; and it was 'Dick!' and 'Pat!' and 'Well, it *is* good to see you again!' You know! The first few minutes were jolly. Then I saw that he was keeping something back.

"I said, 'What you're going to do, is to sit down there and tell me all about it. You're in trouble, and I want to hear.'

" 'What a brick you are!' he exclaimed—a man's always astonished when you notice anything that's as plain as a pillar-box; a woman would have been waiting for me to say it from the moment she came into the room.

" 'Is it money?' I said

new it would never be the same thing between
ny more. . . .
'Who is she?' I said.
That started him, and he gave me a catalogue
er fascinations that made me tired. She was
hiffon Girl. She had gone over to Paris with
sister, and been taken to see Dick's studio.
and twaddle!—he admitted she didn't know
thing about art. 'Girlish,' he called her; I
ld imagine her in the studio—saying an art-
work must be 'such fun,' and calling every
ure 'sweet'!
By what he said, it seemed to me she was
ting him pretty badly, for all she was so
lish.' She wasn't satisfied to accept him, and
wasn't satisfied to let him go. Didn't want
narry a poor man, but didn't want to lose his
niration. For the last six months he seemed
ave been always bidding her an eternal fare-
l, and getting a note from her about nothing
eek afterwards. She was back in London
—that was why he was here. His gush about
gave me a headache.
'It's a treat to be able to talk it over with
, Pat,' he said.
'Yes,' I said—'ripping!'
He wanted to know if I thought she liked
.

"Well, it was clear she liked him, th whether she liked him enough to live in a f floor flat in West Kensington I had my do But she wasn't nearly good enough for him, was the main thing. I said:

" 'Even if she'll have you, are you sure you're wise to go in for marriage yet? D think I'm speaking selfishly, old man; we s never forget we were pals, you and I, and drop in sometimes after you're married smoke a cigarette with you—if your wife have me—just the same. It's you I'm thinl of—your own happiness. We've both such pals, Dick—I know I may talk frankly to won't you be hampering your work? Won't have to sink your ideals, and paint "The

I "sink," I don't mind the cost; I want Rosie—she's worth all the pictures in the world.'

"'Sh!' I said, 'don't blaspheme! And dear old chap, don't think I'm unsympathetic—you asked me for advice, and I gave it to you honestly, that's all.'

"'You were always a good sort, Pat,' he said. 'But I didn't ask you for advice—I asked you if you thought she liked me.'

"'Oh, as far as that goes,' I said, 'I dare say you could marry her if you went the right way about it.'

"You should have seen him jump! 'How?'

"'So now you *are* asking me for advice!' I said. 'Well, don't make yourself so cheap, Dick.' (It was horrid to have to tell Dick he had 'made himself cheap'; I hated her for it; but it was true.) 'You've run back to her every time she lifted a finger. Show her you mean what you say. You can offer her a home—of a kind—and you've got a future, if you don't let circumstances spoil it. Very well, then. Tell her she's got to marry you, or say "good-bye" to you once and for all.'

"He answered that he *had* told her so.

"'Yes,' I said, 'repeatedly! But tell her so, and stick to what you say. The next time she

whistles, don't go. She'll like you twice as n
for it.'

"I think it surprised him to find that I un
stood anything about girls; but I was a girl
self, though he didn't seem to remember it.

"He cheered up wonderfully after t
Funny my coaching him how to win her wh
didn't want him to, wasn't it? But he tru
me, and I was bound to play straight with h
I should have been a cad if I hadn't pl
straight with him when he was trusting me. S
it was funny, you know—it makes me la
whenever I think of it."

I detected no amusement in her voice.
paused a moment.

"He dropped in a few days afterwards,"

"It was a black Monday for me, though—I had nothing but 'Rosie' all day long!

"And that was only the beginning of it. She didn't make another move for two or three months, and he thought he had lost her. He weakened then. He told me he used to tramp the room, thinking, half the night. His sister and I were the only people who knew—and his sister had gone to Pangbourne, so I got it all. Rather rough on me! But I was awfully sorry for him—I *was* sorry for him! His eyes in the morning!

"Then the girl made another step—she fished for an invitation to spend a week at Pangbourne. By that time he was in such a fever that he wanted to propose to her again as soon as she arrived, but his sister said 'No'; she said the best thing he could do was to make the girl fancy he was getting over it. I don't know how much trouble she had with him, but she rubbed her idea in pretty thoroughly, for he came and asked me to help him.

"He said, 'Alice thinks'—Alice was his sister's name; he said, 'Alice thinks I ought to be down there when Rosie comes, and pretend I don't mind any more.'

" 'If you go at all,' I said, 'that *is* what you ought to do at first.'

"He said, 'She thinks if Rosie once saw me making up to somebody else, it'd be all right.'

" 'Well, I always told you that you had let her feel too sure of you,' I said.

" 'The only thing is,' he said, 'there's no other girl there. Will *you* come down and see me through, Pat?'

"I did flare out then! To ask me to—I mean it did seem—— Well, it was a little too much!

"He was all apologies in a minute. I never saw a man so taken aback in all my life. 'No idea of offending me—I had been such a pal that he didn't imagine I'd cut up rough.' Said he had asked me as he might have asked Alice, only as Alice was his sister she'd be no use. He kept saying how sorry he was to have annoyed me—

lt with, excepting that she hadn't a brain.
ad invited a man who didn't count to take
to luncheon, and Dick took *me*. Rosie
pleased with me at luncheon. Afterwards
owed me the garden, and I brought him
th a flower in his button-hole. Rosie was
. During the evening, in the moonlight,
pensively it must be divine on the water
nd Rosie looked as if she hoped I'd be
d.

were away about an hour. Curious—we
er been on the river together before. He
ore me too much about her; he talked
work, and mine, and—we had a lot in
. . . . It was about the last time we
id have a talk together.

well, he had the game in his hands from
inning! Before we had been down there
s he told me they were engaged.
rrah!' I said. 'Good luck to you, old

u've been a trump,' he said; 'if it hadn't
r you, she might never have known her
rt. I'm so grateful to you, Pat, I'd like
you.'

, rats!' I said—'I don't go in for senti-

The Bachelor Girl's voice trembled. She paused again.

"I *had* flirted, though," she added defiantly, "when Rosie was watching; and it was a great joke. They were married in the autumn. I never see him now, but he's selling 'The New Kittens' and 'Baby's First Rattle' for big prices. . . . It's time we had tea. Well, you wanted to think of a tale, and you've been told one instead. Not that it would do for you—it isn't pathetic."

"It wouldn't do at all," I said, "it's very humorous."

And I looked at the fire as I answered, because I knew she was crying.

THE LAURELS AND THE LADY

I

When Willy Childers was sent to the Cape, he went to the last country on the face of the habitable globe to which he was suited. It is certainly a question whether he would have made a success of life anywhere, but at the Cape he was so much out of place that he became conspicuous. In Paris, when he had learnt the language, he would at least have felt at home; he would have drifted by slow degrees into a congenial set in London. But on the Diamond Fields, a young man who hoped to be a poet, and who already wrote verse, was an incongruity that defies comparison.

To give him his due, he was conscious that his presence was absurd there and justified the chaff that it received, and he loathed the "Fields" with a deeper loathing than any other member of its perspiring population. But he could not go to the length of altering his nature and becoming brisk and enterprising, nor did he want to do that. It was not with his nature, but with his

environment that he found fault. "Lucky rhymes to him were scrip and share," and he was full of confidence that his "mellow metres" were going to make him celebrated one day. He would rather have been left in peace with plenty of stationery than have had the business of any broker in the Market.

It was as a broker that he began. His uncle, Blake Somerset, was the manager of the Fortunatus Mining Company in Bultfontein; and when Willy came down from Oxford, Somerset wrote, to the Dulwich villa, that, "now all that damned University foolishness was over, the boy had better buckle to and try to make a living."

It must be conceded that Willy had not distinguished himself at Oxford, and displayed no ability for any of the recognised professions

mercial. She, too, had felt Brasenose to be foolishness—indeed, she had felt the adjective which she might not use; and the possession of a son who seemed content to roam about the garden with a book of Rossetti's, or Walter Pater's, and who confessed that he didn't know the multiplication-table, was causing her considerable disquietude. She wondered if there had been any eccentricity in the past "on poor dear Robert's side."

Yes, the maternal view was different from Willy's. She retracted her suggestion that he should read for the Bar—it had been but a half-hearted compromise when she made it—and declared that the Cape offered far finer prospects. She decided that it was just the plan "to take the nonsense out of him"; and she answered her brother to the effect that his nephew would sail in two or three weeks' time, though she refrained from explaining to him what kind of young man his nephew was.

Somerset was not long in finding it out. He himself looked like a farmer—or as one expects a farmer to look. He had a big red face, and a loud laugh, and was powerfully framed. His biceps might have been a gymnast's. Willy was a disappointment the moment he alighted from the train, being slightly built and consumptive-

looking. And he had no conception of business: that was evident in their initial conversation. Without a suspicion as yet of the young fellow's tendencies, Somerset felt instinctively there was something wrong with him. The ignorance of things that he ought to have known might be excused in remembering the kind of training that he had had; but there was something worse than ignorance; there seemed to be a hint of incapacity. Not only had he no ideas about making money, he didn't appear interested or intelligent in the matter—a fact which promised no brilliant future for him, considering that all he would have at the widow's death was three or four hundred a year.

Nevertheless, being responsible for his coming,

and then you cut about into all the other dealers' and show 'em. It's a pity you don't know anything about a diamond, but you'll soon pick a smattering up. And you're always safe to say 'I've a nice little lot that will just suit you.' "

The description was not very attractive to the Oxford man; but being already uncomfortably conscious that his uncle did not think much of him, he made a gallant attempt to simulate an alacrity that he couldn't feel.

The introductions were duly effected, and, having procured a licence, Willy embarked on his career as a diamond broker without delay. He was equipped with a morocco-leather satchel, furnished with many pockets and designed to carry all the "parcels" that were to be entrusted to him.

But he did not get any. He hadn't effrontery enough. When he made his applications he asked as briefly as possible if there was anything for him, and slunk out mortified as soon as the man said "no." This though he did not fail to observe that his more experienced competitors entered with a cheery greeting, an air of confidence, and sometimes "Such a good story! I must tell you, Mr. Meyerstein!" which proved much more effectual. Half an hour after the Market opened he had repeated his dreary formula vainly in

every doorway in the street. Then he returned to his hotel, and dreamed of fame and England. His uncle, hearing of his speedy withdrawal, told him that it wouldn't do. If he wished to succeed, he must remain on the scene and manage to look as if he were succeeding. Willy, with a heavy heart, took the hint; and from ten o'clock till four henceforward, with the thermometer at a hundred degrees in the shade, he bustled round and round the crooked little flaring road, vaunting his empty satchel as if he were very busy indeed. But the pretence did not seem to impress any of the dealers, who sat in their shirt-sleeves, behind the wide windows, weighing diamonds in lack-lustre scales; and when he called, they always replied that they "weren't sending any-

her to cope with alone. Perhaps by-and-by
ke might be able to put him into "a clerkship
something" that would enable him to keep
self decently? In the meanwhile, the extra
ense would not amount to so much as his pas-
e would cost! Somerset, who had lost all in-
est in his nephew, accordingly looked about,
l presently contrived to obtain a post for him;
l Willy went into the Magistrate's Court at
Toit's Pan, to keep the Criminal Record,
l take affidavits of assault and other offences,
a salary of three pounds a week.

That had been two years ago; and, as if to
tify his uncle's poor opinion of him, he was a
rk in the same place still.

This afternoon he sat idly before his desk in
sweltering office, and gazed through the bars
the open window at two or three Kaffir pris-
rs in charge of a police serjeant, waiting till
ir names were called. They had their backs
inst a wall, and their feet in the thick, hot
st. Through the door that communicated with
shed-like court, he could hear the droning
es of the assistant magistrate disposing of the
e in hand.

Presently the voice of the interpreter, shouting
n Sixpence! Piccanini! Tom Fool!" pro-
imed the turn of the negroes outside. The

serjeant gave them a push, and they moved for
ward apathetically, drawing their blankets close
about their skinny thighs. The baking wall and
the glare of dust were all that was left to see
Childers closed his eyes wearily—his sight had
been troubling him of late—and leant back in
his chair, wondering if life had any surprise in
store for him—if anybody else on earth was so
entirely wretched.

His faith in himself had deserted him by now
and he no longer foresaw himself a celebrity. He
was very young indeed for confidence to have
gone, but he was not naturally self-reliant, and
it had been chaffed out of him. He was sick
with a longing for sympathy—quite the last
thing attainable here. In truth, he presented one

The interpreter brought in the list, for the misdemeanours and sentences to be entered in the record.

"Good-afternoon, Massa Childers; I'm gwine home."

"Good-afternoon, Mukasa."

II

It was a quarter to five. Mr. Shepherd, the assistant magistrate—a young man with a pink-and-white complexion, who had grown a beard in order to make himself look older—consulted his watch and yawned.

"Heigho, poet!"

"Tired, sir?"

"Tired and dry. We'll have a liquor as soon as we shut the shop. By the bye, the mail's in."

The assistant magistrate was always among the first to know when the mail was in, being engaged to a girl in England. Later on she would make her home here, and cry to be back in Clapham.

Childers was also interested in the arrival of the mail. He had submitted his volume of poems four months since to perhaps the only firm of publishers left for it to go to, and it was within

the bounds of possibility that there might be a line by this time conveying their "regrets."

"Are they delivering yet?" he asked.

"I didn't hear," said Mr. Shepherd; "my letters always come to the Club. I say, are you going to the theatre to-night?"

"Not to-night. Of course I shall go some evening or other. But I expect all to-night's seats are gone."

"No, they say there are still some left to fight for at the doors. All the best ones are gone, you bet—two pounds each!"

"Great Scott! Better than clerking—eh?"

"Better than trying niggers in the Pan, too," said the assistant magistrate. "Did you ever see her at home?"

coming the year previous, but the negotiations fell through, and there was nothing better than a prize-fight on the border of the Orange Free State. Now the famous actress had actually arrived. The local papers had been teeming for weeks with all the anecdotes of her that had been worn threadbare in Paris and London a decade and more ago. Her eccentricities, her extravagance, her pet tiger-cub, and her eighty thousand pounds' worth of dresses—the public read the stories all over again, and enjoyed them. Such of the stores as sold photographs had crowded their windows with her likenesses, and the walls of the corrugated-iron theatre, and the bar beside it were placarded with the name of Rosa Duchêne in letters five feet long. Every editor on the Fields had rushed in person to interview her; and this morning's *Independent* detailed her "impressions" of the place, which she had artlessly declared seemed to her to contain a larger number of handsome men and pretty women than any other city of its size that she had seen. Even Rosa Duchênes cannot afford to neglect such "impressions."

Willy lit his pipe, and puffed at it with a sudden sense of pleasure. Yes, he would go this evening, if he could get in! It would be an emotion

tasted earlier than he had expected it. Did Mr. Shepherd mean to go?

Ted Shepherd said that he did. The five-shilling seats were quite good enough for him, and they would go together if Willy liked. He glanced at his watch again, and started.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, "we've stopped five minutes too long. Come on, poet, we'll go and have that drink."

They picked up their wideawakes hurriedly, and strolled into the Club.

The boy behind the bar had fallen asleep and was dozing as peacefully as the flies allowed, for work in the mines did not conclude till "sun-down" and the Club was almost deserted at this hour. The only members visible were a digger, whose enterprise had terminated by reason of

whir of the buckets and the throbbing of en-
es across the road—a clamour of impatient
es. The digger, who was looking at a picture
Hyde Park Corner in the *Illustrated London*
vs, and wondering how long it would be be-
he saw the original again, became aware of
so, and he dropped the paper with apprehen-

I'm afraid that's about *me*," he said, turning
er pale.

What's wrong, Johnny?" asked Shepherd.

It's the Boys, I expect! You see, I couldn't
'em this morning; they'll go for me if they
the chance."

Willy went to the door, followed by everybody
epting Johnny Teale. A gang of some fifty
gers, Zulus, Kaffirs, and Basutos, of all ages,
surged to the foot of the *stoep*—a low, grav-
l veranda before the club—and were demand-
their wages, or Mr. Teale's blood.

It *is* the Boys," said Willy.

I thought so. Well, tip 'em some of your
es, poet, and calm 'em down!"

Why don't you pay the beggars?" said the
agent.

Pay 'em?" echoed the ex-lessee of the Mooi
Mining Company. "That cursed ground

hasn't yielded working expenses for weeks. Pay 'em? Do you think I'm the Standard Bank?"

The doctor exhorted him to come forward, and he came gingerly. His appearance was greeted with loud yells, and a hundred naked arms were lifted in execration and appeal. In the instinctive way that the negroes lifted their arms, there was a touch of dignity, even of tragedy, that would have gladdened a London super-master's heart. Presently, however, by dint of fervid promises which he had no prospect of being able to fulfill, Teale succeeded in inducing the posse to depart. And, this consummation attained, he dragged his supporters jubilantly to the bar.

Childers was not among them. He made his way, through the dust and ox-wagons on the

to wash, and dine, and to exchange—to-night—their Bedford-cords for dress-suits that were relics of a European past.

In Kimberley, dress-suits were worn more frequently, but Kimberley was three miles from Du Toit's Pan and, by comparison, fashionable. There were even men in Kimberley who wore stiff collars every day. And the theatre was there. Du Toit's Pan had nothing but the Club, and an hotel, and a corrugated-iron church.

It was early when Childers and his chief met again and drove into the larger township. But a crowd had already collected under the electric lamps of Main Street. And when the doors were opened, and the pair at last gained seats, they squeezed into them breathless.

A long procession of "carts" sped over the bare connecting road in the next half-hour. The "Rush" hummed with "carts." Comparatively small as was the theatre, it appeared to those in it to contain the population of all the camps. When the orchestra came in, the house looked like a hill of white arms and bosoms, and shining shirt-fronts. A novel and agreeable flutter of suspense stole through the audience; women glanced and smiled towards one another with little, excited nods. Many had forgotten, for the instant,

where they were and, in fancy, were transported to the Français or the Gaiety, where they had seen Duchêne last.

Some touch of the excitement below communicated itself to Childers upstairs. As the three foreign knocks sounded, he leant forward eagerly. The play was *La Dame Aux Camélias.* It began with a few lines between de Varville, seated by the mantelpiece, and Nanine, the maid. Willy strained in vain to distinguish what was said; he had never read the piece, though he knew the plot.

There was the entrance of Nichette; she spoke briefly to Nanine, and left. And then followed an exhausting conversation between the man and the girl, during which the audience suppressed

then come to bless them, and it was nearly a minute before she could speak.

As the act proceeded, Childers found his throat tightening queerly. The story has been as much abused as any that was ever written; but sickly, unhealthy, morbid, or not, it is a story that appeals to almost every imaginative young man. It fascinates him strongly as it develops; perhaps he, too, may one day meet a Marguerite? In secret he has often wished to do so; and he identifies himself with its hero, who, on the stage, is so splendid in his romance and passion, and in the book, by his own confession, as arrant a cad as ever escaped having his head punched. From a theatrical point of view it has a greater recommendation: it provides a leading actress with an opportunity which few modern dramas equal. And to-night Duchêne, who had carefully selected it for her opening performance, availed herself of the opportunity to the fullest.

She was at this time nearly forty years of age, but behind the footlights she did not look a day more than twenty-five. Her grace, her power, the tricks—which in their apparent spontaneity concealed such cleverness that it demanded a fellow-player to appreciate them as they deserved—took one novice among the spectators by storm. At the end of the second act he felt that he was

in the presence of a revelation. During the fifth act, tears rolled down his face, and he tried furtively to hide them with his programme, afraid that Shepherd would ridicule him.

The result of Willy Childers' going to see Rosa Duchêne was really a foregone conclusion; gun-powder had met the spark and only one thing could happen. A poet—that he was a pseudo poet matters very little—who had been eating his heart out on the Diamond Fields was confronted, for the first time in his life, with a beautiful woman who was a genius. When the curtain fell and the people rose and screamed at her, Willy did not scream; he kept his seat, quivering hysterically. He was wrenched by the death-scene that he had witnessed; the agony of

her when she grieves—one leaves the theatre having seen nothing at all of her real nature. But how much has one seen of the young girl's with whom one may, more conventionally, fall in love at a dance? Both have uttered things that were not natural to them during the evening; and, to say the least of it, the actress's pretence has been as attractive as the girl's. One man would like to take her out to supper; another would make of her an ideal and an inspiration. She has charmed them both; and the fact that suppers may be more in her line than inspiration is irrelevant.

He escaped from Shepherd, and taking up a position by the stage-door, waited there in the hope of obtaining a glimpse of her when she left. The hope was not fulfilled; she must have come out by another exit.

The intense dry heat and the sun's blinding glare had been succeeded by a faint breeze, and as he drove home his mind spun more quickly for its freshness, and the rapid motion of the "cart." He thought again of his volume of verse at the London publishers', and saw it accepted and triumphant. An unfamiliar exhilaration throbbed in his veins, and fancy mounted beyond control, playing all sorts of pranks, unexpected and delightful, till it seemed lifting him into heaven.

It was only when the horses stopped that he returned to reality. From the stagnant *pan* came the croaking of frogs, and the howling of innumerable stray curs. The mine yawned deeply in the night, and, with the suggestion of gigantic gallows, the structures of the hauling gear round the reef rose blackly against a luminous sky. From the Club, there was the click of billiard balls and a jingle of glasses. But he did not go in.

III

SHEPHERD was the first to suspect what was the matter. Probably because he saw more of Childers than anybody else did; possibly because

Toit's Pan uncontrollably. It became the favourite pastime to lure him into the smoking-room and invent anecdotes about his enchantress. He was old enough to have forgotten how to blush, but he blushed still, and his face, while the stories were told, supplied them with a superfluous sauce piquante.

And cartoons were made of him, and pasted on the wall. In one he sang—

> "Ask nothing more of me, sweet,
> All I can give you, I give";

and was depicted on his knees to the actress, with an ode in one hand and a child's money-box in the other. Life was made in various ways a burden to him, though no one meant any harm. "Good-morning; have you been to the theatre, Childers?" became the stock joke, a catch-phrase with which he was greeted by everybody; and when he did go to the theatre now, he slunk in late, and hid himself at the back of the gallery from shame.

It was when half of Duchêne's season of six weeks had expired that the chaff stopped; and it stopped abruptly. For the first time men spoke of Willy Childers in a tone of gravity. One morning he had not appeared at the Magistrate's Court; he had sent a few lines in a pain-

ful, sprawling hand, to say that his sight was much worse—that he was "afraid it was serious"; and a few days after that, the news circulated that he was blind.

In improving tales, when the misunderstood boy loses his sight, all his acquaintances reproach themselves for their cruelty towards him and flock to his simple parlour to listen to him talking like a tract and derive a lasting moral from the patience he displays. It did not happen like that in Willy Childers' case, because the men had no idea that they had shown any cruelty. Excepting for Ted Shepherd, and one or two other very occasional visitors, he passed his time in unbroken solitude.

Of course it was useless for him to remain on

occupy themselves. He could do nothing but think, and compose verse in his head; he sat helpless in the blazing iron shanty, listening to the clamour of machinery, throughout the day, or the crooning of Kaffirs, crouched round their bonfires, when the moon rose. And in this fashion a fortnight wore itself past.

Johnny Teale was the man! Others participated, and so were guilty—among them Blake Somerset—but Johnny Teale was the man that suggested the trick; let it be stated! There was a girl in the "Rush" in those days referred to as "Poll Patchouli"—she had opened a shop, at the back of the Diamond Market, for the sale of bad scent, after she left the ladies' orchestra, with which she had come from Natal. Her real name was not known. She called herself "Olive Esmond," but that has nothing to do with it. She was not considered pretty; she was, in fact, thought very plain, even in a spot where men were not exacting in the matter of feminine attractions and a little comeliness went a long way. She was, however, an amusing girl, not wholly uneducated; and a fortnight after Willy's retirement to the cottage opposite the Fortunatus tailings-heap, it transpired that she had a singular accomplishment: she could imitate Rose Duchêne to the life. She did it so well, according to an

enthusiast who had heard her, that she might have got an engagement at Home at a music-hall. He said you "could have shut your eyes and sworn Duchêne was speaking."

It was precisely this criticism that gave Johnny Teale his idea. If you could shut your eyes and think Duchêne was speaking, she might be presented to a blind man as Duchêne herself.

Some of the group to which he propounded it certainly demurred. They said it would be blackguardly to play tricks with Childers now and objected a good deal in an irresolute way. But Teale set himself to argue their scruples into air. For Childers to have a conversation with Polly under the impression she was the actress "wouldn't do the poor chap any harm," he insisted—"on the contrary, it'd give him immense

spoof, Polly," they said. "You've heard of Willy Childers?"

No, she had not heard of him; who was he?

"Well, he thinks he's a poet, and he has lost his sight, and he's in love with Duchêne," explained Teale. "Now, we want to tell him we're going to introduce him to her, and then bring him to *you*—d'ye see? He'll make love to you as violently as he knows how, and you're to pretend to be awfully taken with him, and kid him on—d'ye see? Of course you'll talk all the time like Duchêne, and end by vowing he's the only man in the world for you! And we—two or three of us—'ll be hidden about the place somewhere, watching the game—d'ye see? *You* know! D'ye think you can do it?"

The girl laughed. She was not disgusted by the infamous taste of the project; it struck her as being an uncommonly funny one.

"You may bet all you've got I can do it," she said. "Rather! What a lark! When'll you bring him, boys?"

"Well, it's got to be carried out carefully," said Teale; "one of us must go and say that he has met her; and then, very kindly, say he'll try to get permission to present Childers to her. He's as green as they make 'em, but it won't do to

rush the thing through as if it were as easy as ordering a drink. Say Thursday, eh?"

"Right," said Polly. "Thursday. Is he really crazy for her, or just spoons?"

"Shouldn't wonder if he knelt down and kissed your boots."

She threw back her head and laughed again.

"I shall enjoy this," she exclaimed. "It's something I like!"

No time was lost in acquainting Willy with the privilege that might be in store for him; and for a moment the expressions of gratitude into which he broke made the conspirators feel almost as despicable as they were.

They left him in a fever of suspense for a couple of days. And then he was told that Teale and Ted Shepherd were to take him to Duchêne

Rosa Duchêne and hearing her talk, though he wouldn't see her, dizzied him. At night he could not sleep; and he passed the long morning praying to hear each hour strike on the little American clock that he had bought to let him know how the time went since his watch became useless. When Teale and the assistant magistrate arrived, and guided him up into the "cart," the effort of replying to them was pain. He thanked God when he could be silent. His breathing apparatus was playing the same tricks that it had played in the theatre, and the clip-clop sound of the horses' hoofs seemed to be vibrating in his inside.

The hotel to which they were bound was not the Queen's, where Duchêne was really staying, but a third-rate hotel called the Royal, and his companions had misgivings lest he should detect the difference. On reaching Kimberley, Teale began to talk again eagerly, to distract his attention; but it was taking unnecessary trouble. His affliction was too recent, and his excitement too great, for the dupe to have such acuteness of perception.

The driver stopped; and Shepherd, who had agreed to come, less because he looked forward to being amused by the deception than because he wished to see that it was not carried too far,

helped the blind man down, his pink-and-whi
complexion pinker than usual.

They were met in the hall by a Kaffir servar
who had been carefully rehearsed in his part. E
showed his teeth in a grin of appreciation.

"Is Madame Duchêne in?" said Teale. "We'
expected."

The negro disappeared, and after a few mi
utes returned to conduct them to a poor, grou
floor room that opened on to a *stoep* and a ba
yard. At one end was a small bedstead, with
washhand-stand at the foot. The rest of the fu
niture consisted of a chest-of-drawers, a chint
covered couch, and a couple of basket-chairs.
few coloured plates from the summer numbers
the English illustrated papers had been paste

Teale nudged him and frowned.

"'All right'?" he echoed. "Well, I don't know what *you* were used to, my lord, but it's about as fine as anything *I* ever struck. Look at that tapestry, and those bally idols over there, and—why, the woman must be mad to carry such things about with her!"

"What's it like?" asked Willy in a reverent voice.

"It's Oriental," said Teale; "shouldn't you call it 'Oriental,' Shepherd? By Gum! I should like to see her flat in Paris, if this is the sort of thing she goes in for for six weeks. What's the Eastern smell; don't you notice it?"

It was a pastille that had been set burning in the soap-dish. He affected to explore for it among countless treasures.

"This is it," he said; "in this Pagoda affair. What does she keep her rooms so dark for; a bit mystic, ain't it? Take care! don't move, Childers, or you'll tumble over a tiger's head. Hullo!"

There was a woman's step in the passage, and as they caught it, Willy turned a dead white. The group outside, who could see but not hear, puffed their cigarettes and continued to stare in curiously.

"Here she is," murmured Shepherd. "Stand up, boy!"

Willy obeyed as the door opened; and Poll Patchouli came in.

IV

"GOOD-AFTERNOON, gentlemen," she said languidly. "Ah, monsieur! be seated, I beg."

Her "monsieur" was the only false note, and of that he was no judge. Every pulse in his body leapt at her entrance; every nerve in him quickened at the rustle of her cheap little frock across the floor. To him it was brocade of a mysterious rose tint and there was old lace on her bosom.

She sank into one of the basket-chairs, and looked towards his companions for approval,

have spoken to you will be something to remember all my life."

The girl smiled almost as broadly as the negro had done.

"You are very—very—what is the word in English?—complimentary," she drawled. "You must not make me vain, you know! And you are too modest also—is it not, Mr. Teale? I am told that your poems are quite charming."

Even Shepherd was amused; she was doing it very well. The spectators at the window pushed against one another inquiringly.

"Will you not recite one to me?" she asked.

"Bravo," said Teale, "the very thing! Go on, Childers; let madame hear something you've done."

"I couldn't," said Willy. "Forgive me, madame; I couldn't, indeed!"

"In Paris," said Polly, "many poets recite their verses to me. Yes, truly, you are too modest, monsieur. Well, as you please; then let us talk! You are fond of the theatre, eh?"

He bowed. "Passionately of late!" he answered awkwardly.

"Aha! but he can make pretty speeches, too, our modest poet. You, Mr. Teale, have not said anything so nice to me. But perhaps you do not feel it, either?"

"Everybody raves about madame Duch said Shepherd; "Mr. Teale and I are very oured to be—er—very honoured indeed."

He caught signals from the onlookers, drew Teale's attention to them. They growing impatient out there. The dialogu lost upon them, and viewed as a pantomim scene was dull. Polly saw the gestures, too shook her fist at the crowd joyously.

"To-night," she resumed, "I play one o favourite rôles—Marguerite."

In point of fact she was mistaken: Du was to play Frou-Frou. But Willy coul read the newspapers any more.

"I've seen you in it," he said eagerly. "I at your first performance. I shall never se

"It must be awful," she murmured.

"Mr. Childers is going Home very soon," said Shepherd, "and then all of us poor beggars'll be jealous of him."

"You and he may meet in London, madame," added Teale. "You'll go to the theatre next time madame Duchêne plays in London, won't you, Childers? Perhaps she'll let you call on her there, too?"

Polly shifted her chair irritably.

"Will you be able to go about in London, Mr. Childers?"

"I don't know many people in England," he said; "I'm afraid not. I shall be in Dulwich, with my mother."

"But you will make friends," she urged; "won't you? You won't be tied to the house always?"

"I shan't be very lively company; I don't suppose many men'll be anxious to be my friends."

"Ah, well," exclaimed Teale, "'a boy's best friend is his mother!" Ain't she, madame?"

"Gentlemen," said Polly, springing up, "I'm sure you two would like a cigar on the *stoep!* Don't move, Mr. Childers. They'll come back to you."

Johnny Teale stared.

"You would like a cigar on the *stoep,*" she

repeated. And as it was evident that she me
to be obeyed, they said that it was a very ki
suggestion, and withdrew. Teale consoled hi
self with the idea that they were to be afford
a view of Willy on his knees.

She did not speak for some moments after t
door closed. She sat in the chair that Teale h
vacated, with her back to the window. Her e
pression had changed and her face was quite so

"Are you pleased they've gone?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Willy, simply.

"So'm I. I want to talk to you—I like yc
Do you know, I never was so sorry for anybo
in the world before?"

"You make me feel almost glad I'm blind.
I've prayed that I might talk to you one day.

you . . . to hear you say you had read my verse . . . to feel there was a sort of—a sort of sympathy between us. Are you laughing at me?"

She put out her hand and touched him. She had given her hand to many men, but never quite like that. Willy had a wild impulse to lift it to his lips, but did not do so—afraid again. She had hoped that he would.

"Do you like me as much as you thought you were going to?" she asked, after a silence.

"Yes," said Willy; "you're just what I was sure you must be."

"Really?"

"Really!"

"That's good!" she said, smearing a tear off her cheek with the hand that was not resting on him. "Shall you come again—I mean alone?"

"May I?" he cried. "Do you mean it? Oh, but how can I—I forgot! I can't go anywhere alone any more. This is the first time I've been out since I lost my sight—Teale and Ted Shepherd offered to bring me."

"The beasts!" said Poll Patchouli in her throat.

"If I may come again with them——?"

"No, don't do that! Where do you live? Perhaps one day, as you're all by yourself, *I'll* come

and see *you*. But I don't want you to talk abou it, if I do. I—— No, I never *shall* come!"

"Why? Why not? I won't speak a word o it to a soul if you don't wish me to; but it woul be a charity—I'm sure you'd have no need t mind. Oh, I'd bless you, madame! Please!"

"Why do you like me?" she said sullenly. "Yo must be an awful fool to like a woman you don' know!"

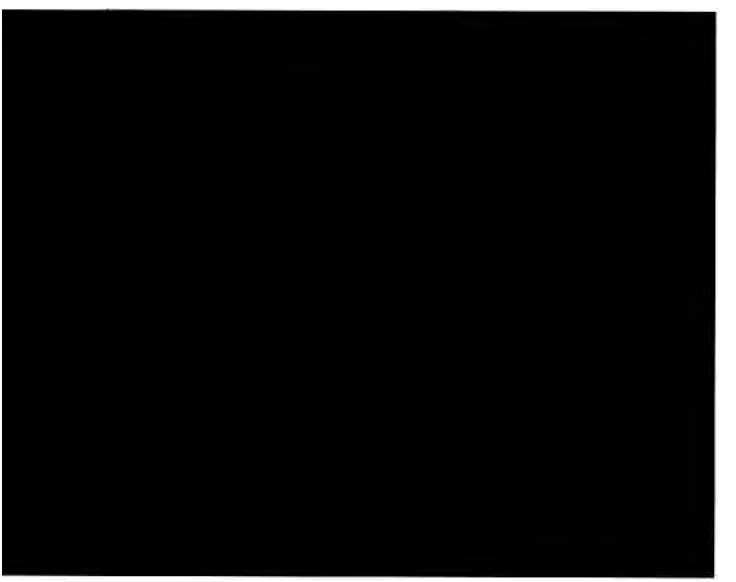
"I do know you now," he faltered, shrinking "And besides——"

"Besides—what?" said Polly.

"I had seen you on the stage; is that nothing?

"Never mind the stage. Imagine you've onl seen me here to-day."

"Well?"



"I mean I have heard the name. No, my acquaintance with the Diamond Fields is not so extensive as all that, monsieur! But I will find it, and I will come."

Her accent was much more marked in the last sentence than it had been a few moments ago, but its resumption was unnecessary; the first impression had been all-powerful, and he was drunk with delight.

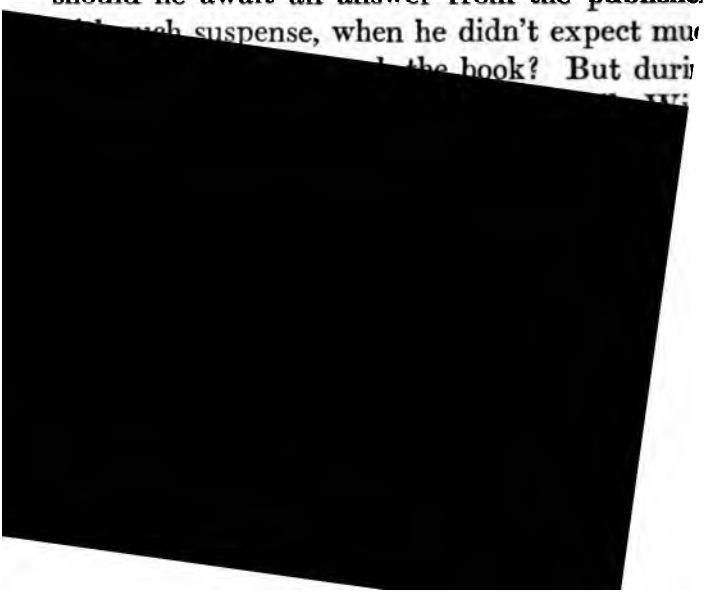
Indeed, when the entertainment was over, he was the only one who was entirely satisfied with it. Johnny Teale and his party felt that the hoax had "panned out less brilliantly than it had promised"; and Polly, alone in her room, threw herself on the bed and cried miserably, without knowing why.

V

It was significant that she did not call upon him for three days, though she wanted to do so very much. It was significant also that, when she did go, she put on her prettiest hat and frock and made herself look as dainty as she could, though her host would not be able to see her. Her visit intensified that strange emotion to her, pity for a man. And the step, once taken, she went again—without vacillating. And Bad Shil-

ling was despatched for meals for two from the Carnarvon; and their afternoons were so pleasant that sometimes before they parted, stars were in the sky.

There was now demanded of the girl an infinitely more difficult achievement than that required of her at the Royal Hotel; she found herself expected to realise, and respond to an artist's aspirations. She could not do it, quite. But if she simulated more comprehension of them than she could feel, she did, by degrees, come to gain a glimmer of the blaze within him, too. She had to strain for it hard at first—so hard that she was surprised at her own patience; many of his confidences were meaningless to her, foreign. Wh should he await an answer from the publishe suspense, when he didn't expect mu the book? But duri



self for having allowed the joke to be played at all, and the discovery of the lengths to which it had been carried annoyed him.

Polly started in alarm, but Childers, who had no cause to be embarrassed, performed what he believed to be the ceremony of introduction with perfect calmness.

"I don't think you have met my uncle," he said; "have you? Mr. Somerset—madame Duchêne."

Somerset was about to answer with a brutal laugh, but a gesture from the girl checked him.

When they were outside, and out of earshot, she stopped and looked at him appealingly.

"Are you going to give me away?" she said. "Are you going to tell him? Don't! I'm not doing any harm. Please don't tell him!"

"This is damned nonsense!" exclaimed Somerset. "The boy's an ass, but you've no right to have a game like this with him, you know; it won't do!"

"I'm not doing any harm," she insisted, "really! Of course it's a beastly shame in one way, but—but it does cheer him up. You must see for yourself how much brighter he is. And—and if you tell him, you'll break his heart."

"Rats!" said Somerset. "Don't talk such piffle!"

"You'll break his heart!" she flared out. "Not that you'd mind much, I suppose, if you did. Well, go back and do it. Go in and say, 'That isn't Rosa Duchêne who comes to see you; it's a girl they call "Poll Patchouli" and everybody's been kidding you.' Go on! Then you won't have to take him to England—because he'll be buried here before you start; and it'll be you who'll have killed him, as sure as a gun!"

"D'ye mean to tell me," said Somerset blankly, "that you think he'll never find out? You must be as daft as *he* is, you little fool. . . . Oh, well, *I* don't care; do as you like—it can't last long, that's one thing! When are you coming again?"

"I'm coming to-morrow," said Polly. "And if you think it all so shocking, I wonder you let

she liked the young man who talked to her of things that she had never heard talked of before. The temptation was too strong to be resisted; and, prompted by the fact that Duchêne's season had been extended for a week, she told him, when she went on the morrow, that it had been extended for six weeks.

Childers' joy was pitiful to behold. He had been happier of late, in his blindness, than he had ever been when he had sight; the sudden news that his paradise would endure, when the groan of its closing gates was already in his soul, was a relief so intense that its outcome frightened her.

From the beginning she had been aware that he was in love with her; but now she saw how wildly he was in love, and she was aghast. Her life had not accustomed her to regard sexual attraction as a serious matter. Though she had not continued to view her imposture lightly, she had not grasped the full responsibility of it till then.

She gazed at him wildly, with trembling lips, like a child who has smashed something.

"Are you so glad," she faltered—"so glad as all that?"

The consciousness crept through her, as she asked it, that she, too, was glad—not in the friv-

olous way that she had thought, but as a woman is glad to remain with a man who has grown dear to her. She moved slowly over to him, and took his hands down from his face, and dropped on her knees before him—wondering at them both.

"Willy," she whispered, "say something—I love you!"

He couldn't answer. But she felt what she had done. And she forgot then that the whole thing was a lie—forgot what an exclamation would burst from him if he could see her. It was her own kisses that he was returning; it was her own clasp that made him shake like that!

The deception had gone further still, and there began for the blind man a period in which he tasted all the triumphant rapture of possessing a beautiful and celebrated woman whom he adored. When he embraced Polly, his delusion

Duchêne was his own; visited him daily; vowed she was wretched when they were apart! She, a genius, renowned all the world over, discussed with him the prospects of his poems' acceptance and entered into his hopes and fears! Why was he a nonentity? If only he could climb nearer to worthiness!

One afternoon, a fortnight later, when Polly went to the post-office to inquire if there was anything for him, she found that the publishers' reply had at last arrived. She saw their name on the envelope; and a roll of manuscript, which the clerk handed to her also, showed that the work was declined. She took the things, almost as disconsolate as her lover would be, and wondered, on her way to the cottage, how she was to break the news to him, how she could be gentle enough.

He had come out on the *stoep* to listen for her. He knew where she had been, and the eagerness on his face made the words that she had to speak more difficult to her still.

"Dearest!" said Childers—and waited.

"There's a letter," said Polly, reluctantly; "I haven't opened it yet." The rejected manuscript oppressed her; she put it down on the table with her sunshade.

"From *them?*"

"Yes."

"Read it," he begged, breathlessly. "Read it, Rosa, for Heaven's sake!"

She opened the envelope, looking not at it, but at him. It was hateful that it should be she who had to bring the disappointment! The colour was fluttering in his cheeks, and the thin hands held out towards her quivered. Suppose she told him a fib? Suppose she said——? He couldn't *see* the answer! As the notion flashed into her mind she caught her breath; and Willy heard her.

"They've taken it?" he exclaimed.

She was trying confusedly to discern what difficulties such a falsehood would entail, but his question decided her—she could not crush him with the truth after that!

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "they have tak-

—so perhaps they aren't going to pay you for them; but you won't mind that, will you? They'll publish them! And they say 'pleased.' They might have said 'willing,' but they say 'pleased'!"

To her the communication that she had invented sounded very meagre; but she need not have striven to apologise for it. To him the bare fact was more than enough. They were going to bring out his book. He would hold it—hug it—and "soon"! He had been craving all his life, and on an instant Fortune rained favours on him with both hands. Balzac's expression of every artist's prayer recurred to him, "To be celebrated! To be loved!" He marvelled—giddy with exultation—that he could be so calm in the face of miracles. He was Rosa Duchêne's lover and now his *Reveries* was to be given to the world! Then a frightful misgiving seized him.

"You haven't deceived me—it's true?" he gasped.

"It's quite true!" cried Polly. "How could you think such a thing?"

They embraced again, and he told her how proud she should be of him by-and-by.

"You'll 'make' me!" he panted. "If I have written these before I knew you, what shall I do now? I shall be great; Rosa, I shall be great. The man you love'll be known, too—*you'll* have

done it for me. What a beautiful world we live in; and it's the same world that was so ugly the other day! O darling Life, it blows kisses back to me! You fill me with emotions and ideas that tumble over one another. I shall pour them out in my work—my mind and heart are bursting sometimes, too small to hold all you make me feel. I'll dedicate every book to you—you who'll have inspired them all. Oh, thank God I'm a poet! To worship you as I do and be able to lay nothing at your feet would have been torture."

He wandered about the room, with her arm round him, while her troubled gaze turned from time to time to the roll of manuscript on the table.

"Did you believe I was an artist when we first met," he broke out again, "or was it only pity?

"You know your thoughts before you speak them ! I'm jealous of that."

"You're mad!"

He nodded. "I daresay. Nothing satisfies me. But I can't see you—if you knew how I strain! I'd give my right arm to see you now. Turn your face up, and let me try. Great God! it's a wonderful thing to be a woman—and somehow it doesn't seem enough to be a man. One day I'll try to tell you all I feel for you. If I could do it, it'd be the finest poem ever written. And what a relief!"

When she left, the moon was shining. She slipped the manuscript up under her dust cloak, and, reaching home, hid it away remorsefully at the bottom of her box. What would be the result of the lie she had told? She upbraided herself bitterly for her cowardice. But now for him to learn that his work was rejected would be a blow unbearable! Now, whatever happened, he must not know; he would curse her!

VI

In the night the remembrance struck her that she had left the note in his possession; she was seized with the terror that he might show it to Somerset and discover the truth with the rudest

shock possible. She lay tossing restlessly, and the sun had scarcely risen when she drove to Bultfontein, with a face of ashes.

Willy was not visible. He was dressing, with the aid of the Kaffir who attended on him. She sank on to the first chair inside the door and tried to gather voice to call to him.

He entered from the bedroom almost at the same moment, and his appearance suggested that the catastrophe had occurred.

His greeting, however, dispelled her fear.

"I've had news about my mother," he murmured; "she's dead."

The mail carrying Childers' poems had also brought a letter to Somerset. Mrs. Childers had opportunely died of pneumonia—avoiding the

man who had inherited about three hundred and fifty a year been such an encumbrance.

All these facts Childers imparted to Polly.

"We haven't decided what I'm to do," he went on. "I couldn't stop here permanently. even if I wanted to; I'm bound to be a nuisance, you see. It wouldn't be fair for a fellow like me to plump himself on an uncle for life."

"Have you told him about your book?"

"No, it wouldn't interest him—and we talked about my mother's death. No, I didn't say anything about it."

"And I wouldn't, if I were you!" she exclaimed. "I wouldn't say anything to a soul till it is printed. Let it be a secret between us two till the right time comes."

"That's what I thought, darling," he said; "yes."

She passed the day between relief and dismay. It was piteous to think of the loneliness of his situation. She could not have loved him more tenderly if she had been his wife; the further complication that had arisen to harass her appeared, temporarily, graver than anything else.

Willy was no less dismayed; his grief for the loss of his mother was not all. He longed for Duchêne to propose his travelling to England by the same boat as herself, to say that she would be

his constant companion till they had ascertained whether an operation was feasible. This way out of the difficulty must have presented itself to her, he thought; but she had not suggested it. And for him to do so was impossible.

A little constraint crept into his conversations with the girl now; and while she inwardly commented on the difference, he was tremulously waiting, in every pause, for her to make the offer that had never entered her head. Their dream might have continued in England, more deliciously than he had ever dared to hope, and, instead, they were to be divided entirely, by her own choice! He was bitterly wounded, and not even the anticipated arrival of his book—the subject on which he chiefly talked with her—was

every mail day to go to the post-office to inquire for them, and affect to be disappointed when she informed him that nothing had come. She groped, perplexed, in the labyrinth that she had created, questioning helplessly how to sustain it. If the truth were exposed at this stage she would have done him the cruellest, the most cowardly wrong imaginable, and she'd make away with herself! Her only excuse for the deception was that, so far, it had been successful. If the truth came out, after all, it would be the end of her; she'd be like that girl in Bultfontein Road who had taken carbolic acid the other day and been found in a blue heap on the floor!

After each mail she gave thanks for another respite. But when four mails had been delivered, she feared that a longer delay would excite his suspicions. And, facing the inevitable with the courage of despair, she nerved herself to contemplate the boldest stroke that she had planned yet.

While she was perpending it, the prospect of Willy's making the voyage with his uncle was extinguished definitely. Somerset was starting at once, at a couple of days' notice, for a very brief trip indeed. His subordinate on the Fortunatus had been offered a better appointment, and it was necessary for the manager's vacation to be taken while the other was still on the works. In

for the next two months, than he had done while the preparations were going forward. But the consciousness that they all found him an incubus was bad to bear.

His welcome to Polly when she appeared was the outcome of the consciousness and alarmed her. Having taken off her dust coat and hat, and tried vainly to make him talk, she began to prepare their tea.

At last, glancing at him, she said diffidently:

"Has anything happened—you have not much to say? What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing particular. My uncle has gone, that's all."

" 'Gone'? Gone where?"

"To England. It was settled two days ago; didn't I mention it?"

"No," she said, "you didn't. It's strange you forgot to! . . . Then you're quite alone here now —all night, too?"

"Yes," he answered; "all night, too."

But he did not say any more; and with a stare of puzzlement, and her face a little paler, she stood silent. The kettle had been filled, and the wick of the spirit-lamp was lighted; she stood waiting for the water to boil.

"It's boiling, Rosa," said Willy; "I can hear it."

"I was thinking of something else," she said, starting. . . . "There!"

After a moment's struggle with himself he asked, "What were you thinking of?"

"What's the difference?" said the girl.

"*I* was thinking, too."

"I know!" She ran to him impulsively and bent over the chair. "We aren't the same to each other! What is it? Tell me!"

He laughed—or sobbed: "It's you!"

"Me?"

"Oh! don't make me say it! You know as well as I do that I shall be alone in this Heaven-forsaken hole—that, for all one can see, I may end my life in it. *He's* gone, and *you're* going. Picture me sometimes—you'll always be able to

help it? If I can, tell me the way! I'll do it. 'd love to do it! You reproach me for noth- ıg!"

The boy's eyebrows were raised significantly, nd she flung herself on him in a whirlwind.

"If I can help it, tell me the way! You *shall* ell me. I don't know what you mean—I swear don't. I won't let you go till you tell."

"You—haven't thought?"

She shook her head vehemently.

"So why don't you say? Oh, I forgot—I was haking my head! No, no, no; I *don't* know, Will!"

"You'll refuse if you want to?"

"Answer! Yes, I'll refuse if I want to. An- wer!"

"We—you and I—might go to England to- ;ether."

Her clasp on his neck loosened and she lay in ıis arms limp with dismay. This, the natural ourse in the rôle that she was assuming, was a omplication utterly unforeseen by her.

"Go together?" she gasped.

"You don't wish it?"

"Yes, yes! I do! I do! But how?"

"It'd be quite easy. Let your company go on head, and we can follow by another boat! I've hought of everything. In that drawer, there's

my money—you'd take it and get our tickets to Cape Town. I don't know exactly how much money there is, but it's nothing like enough for our passages, and when we got down to the Colony I should wire to the lawyer, and he could cable me out a hundred or two."

"Go on, Will," muttered Polly feverishly, "go on!"

The blessed revelation that she was not expected to pay for her own passage—a thing that would have been as impossible for her as to buy the Kimberley Mine—had brought the colour to her cheeks again. The one question that dizzied her now was, how could she sustain his belief that she was the actress if they travelled on a steamer full of people?

"Well, when we were Home, we would go to a great oculist—somebody who sits in his consulting-room and charges a guinea a minute; somebody with a strange manner that we don't like

didn't suggest it; I thought you didn't care for me any more, that you had grown tired. Won't it be glorious? I shall see your beautiful face close, at last, and it'll be you who helped me to do it. Sweetest, tell me we are going! It seems too wonderful to be true."

"We're going," she said. She put her hand through the open window and pulled at the water-bag. Roughly made of canvas, with the neck of a beer-bottle inserted for a spout, it hung there to render the mawkish, lukewarm water fit to drink. The iciness of its contact with her forehead now cleared her brain.

VII

Compared with this new and stupendous difficulty, the dreaded need for meeting his demand for the copies of his *Reveries* appeared a simple matter enough. When she came next, she placed a parcel on his knees with so little misgiving that she was surprised at herself.

The poet gave a cry of delight. "My book! It's my book!"

She told him to cut the string; but his fingers shook and he couldn't manage it.

"Oh, I can't! . . . You!"

She took the penknife from him; and then let

him unfold the wrappings himself. Six volumes met his touch with an electric thrill—all alike, but each to be caressed apart from the others, each of them lovable and delicious. How delicate was the surface that he stroked! He was holding his firstborn—and he thanked God. The emotion was the true emotion, though it was conjured up by fraud; it was the bliss of ignorance, but, none the less, bliss. He was holding his firstborn, and Polly had given him a joy no meaner than Heaven would have given had it granted him the power that he fancied he had displayed. Six copies of another work, and imagination were as potent as reality.

"Tell me what it's like," he whispered.

"It is," she said, "a pale, curious fawn. The

very *good* looking. I think it looks more uncommon than if it had been thick."

"And the type—big? Is there a wide margin?"

"There's a very wide margin," asserted Polly. "Give me your finger again—there, all that is margin. And the type's splendid! I can read it from here." She could; she could read: "The Norman Conquest. Edward was not a vigorous king; he had little authority, while——"

He cuddled the book, with a long-drawn sigh of content.

"Perhaps soon I shall be able to see it! Rosa, when do we go—need we wait long? I'm on fire! But, oh, I'm happy, too—happy, happy! I'm happier than I ever hoped to be, although I've no eyes. Since I knew you my whole life has changed. How can I repay you?"

Suddenly a passionate desire seized him. "Read me the first poem," he prayed. "Read me *Sic Itur ad Astra;* let me hear Rosa Duchêne speak my verse!"

She stood speechless. Her head was swimming.

"Rosa!"

"Wait!" she stammered; "it's new to me. You are a poet, and it's new to me. Wait till I know them, Willy—I have a reputation to lose."

She thanked her guiding star she had ret
the manuscript; and he, his disappointment
ing, thought how sweet was this timidity in
a woman. He told her his thought, with
umphant tenderness. She resolved that he sh
have plenty of opportunities for the triumj
future.

She had proposed that, on the journey b
them, she should adopt his surname. To ex
the unavoidable suggestion, she had urged
while Duchêne's features might be familia
many, Duchêne's name would be known t
and entail perpetual embarrassment. In a
ing with this, he had removed her initial an
from her mind.

Freed from it, she made the needful prej

she longed and trembled for the hour that was to see them start. She was fighting pluckily, but in moments the enormity of the undertaking to which she had set her hand paralysed her, and at every step she seemed called upon to vanquish a further obstacle that had not been suspected till it barred the way.

When the morning broke at last, her predominant sensation was pleasure. Her own luggage was ready, and while Bad Shilling went for their breakfast she was busy packing the remaining things of Willy's. She was still on her knees, endeavouring to fasten the box, while Willy sat on it, when the Boy returned. His additional weight—for he was a "boy" of about forty years of age, weighing twelve stones—disposed of the matter; and they sat down to the coffee and steaks at the untidy table gaily, reminding each other that it was for the last time.

The negro had come back with a "cart"; and, the meal concluded, they made haste to leave. As they mounted to their seats, the doors of the cottage, and of all the sheds about the works, banged violently; the long, low swishing sound was heard that heralded a dust-storm. In another minute the air was dark, and they hid their faces to shield them from the hissing, stinging grit. Such dust-storms were of constant occur-

rence, but in this one the little Hottentot driver appeared to read a warning, for he lashed forward the horses furiously. They gained the station before the rain that he had foreseen began to fall; but it did fall, in floods—sweeping less fortunate animals off their feet; and Polly's cheerfulness deserted her as she glanced back into the deluge. Superstitiously she felt that the adventure had opened under ominous conditions.

VIII

However, the thirty odd hours in the train were uneventful, and they reached Cape Town safely. Again both were exhilarated. The comparative freshness of the atmosphere; to her, the sparkle of the sea beyond the jetty; and to him,

"How clean everything feels," said Willy—"the towels, and the chair-covers. It's jolly."

She had been thinking so, too. Inside, it was clean, and outside it was green and tranquil. The road that the hostel overlooked was, at this part, an avenue of firs, glinting here and there with branches of the silver-leaves that are sent to England as birthday cards, with stiff little views, or sentiments painted on them. Presently a Malay maidservant—a starched, white triangle from the arm-pits down, with a bright silk fez upon her head—came in with their dinner, and they tasted fruit once more; not fruit as it was procurable in Kimberley, but luscious peaches, and purple figs, and a watermelon plucked since an hour. They sat dawdling over their coffee by the window while the moon rose, and now and again the thrum of a banjo was borne to them on the stillness. And Childers smoked a cigarette, because the situation seemed to call for one, though he enjoyed it only with his fingers now.

In the morning they took one of the trains that pottered between the suburbs and Cape Town, and sent the cablegram to the solicitor. But they were not impatient for the money to arrive. They contemplated with fortitude the two or three days that they would have to pass here.

When the answer came and they left the bank

with a roll of notes in Polly's pocket, they went to the office of the company that had a boat sailing next, to engage their passages; and here they met with their first disappointment. All the berths were booked, and it was necessary for them to wait for the *Union* steamer, which left a week later.

It was disconcerting, but it couldn't be helped. After all, they were comfortable at the inn, and though Childers experienced more regret than Polly, he was not very seriously chagrined, either. They walked home talking, for it was an agreeable walk after one had passed the smell of the tannery at Papendorp. He spoke of the suspense in which he waited to learn how the critics received *Reveries*—the humiliation he would feel if they sneered at it. And then the

stoep, and—— Oh, a lovely old negress with white hair, who's coming down to us! Let's go on—she'd bother us to go over it, perhaps—it's to let."

"We shall find a difference when we get to London, shan't we?" he said. "Fancy it! January! The cold, the wet; the bustling crowds in the foggy streets, and the mud-carts, slopping over. What a contrast!"

"London has got suburbs, too. Dulwich, where you lived, is a suburb, isn't it? It wouldn't be like that if we went to Dulwich?"

"No," he said, "we shouldn't find crowds in Dulwich, because the people who live there never go out; and there'd be no mud-carts, because in deadly Dulwich the mud is never cleared away. But its long, dreary, desolate roads aren't like this one in the least."

Cape Town appeared to him, in spite of his affliction, much more attractive now than it had done eighteen months before, when he saw it. The thought occurred to him that he might turn their enforced delay to account by consulting one of its medical men and obtaining a second and more authoritative opinion. He mentioned the idea to Polly, and she ascertained that the best man to whom he could go was an Englishman—Dr. Eben Drysdale.

They heard very encouraging accounts of his ability. Though not a specialist he had effected some remarkable cures in ophthalmic cases, it was said; and after Polly had written for an appointment, Willy grew more and more excited at the prospect of the visit.

The girl herself did not know what to desire. As they mounted the steps of the house, her knees knocked together. To hope the man might say that no operation would succeed sounded so heartless that she was ashamed to look at Willy while her struggle with the hope was going on; yet for his sight to be restored would mean a tragedy for them both. She often prayed, though to many it may sound improbable; and she shaped an inward, irresolute prayer as they stood

"My sight has been weak for a long while. It's been getting very bad for the last eight months; and about nine weeks ago it failed altogether. At least, I wore a shade for a few days, and then——"

"Yes, yes," said Dr. Drysdale.

"Can anything be done?" asked Polly.

The doctor pondered. "Well, I wouldn't say that no one over there would advise an operation. You might go to Pholett, or to MacIntyre—I daresay MacIntyre might do it—and it's possible it might be partially successful. But . . . Your husband?"

She bowed.

"The question is whether it's good enough for him to go to England on the chance. Anyhow, I shouldn't recommend him to live there."

"I don't understand," said Willy, heavily.

"It wouldn't do your lungs any good, you know. Here, you've everything in your favour. *My* advice to you's to stay where you are. . . . Let's tap you about a bit; you might take off your coat and waistcoat . . . yes, and your shirt, too. Now then, draw a deep breath. . . . Again."

"My lungs aren't strong," stammered Willy. "I know; they never have been. But what you're implying's news to me."

Polly rose in consternation.

"Do you mean that he's ill, doctor—very ill?"

"I mean," said Dr. Drysdale, suddenly evasive, "that I wouldn't recommend England for him, that's all. It isn't a climate that we choose when there's a tendency to any pulmonary complaint, and—and, as your husband says, his lungs aren't exactly strong."

There was a pause that lasted some time.

"We may as well go," said Childers, at last; "I'm glad to have had your opinion. Good-morning."

But as Polly went to the head of the stairs, he turned and spoke to the doctor hurriedly on the threshold.

"I want it straight, please!" he said in a low

The girl was coming back, eager to miss nothing; Willy heard the frou-frou of her skirt.

"If I can't avoid excitement," he questioned, desperately—"if that's impossible?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"You won't live so long."

IX

Willy and Poll Patchouli left the house silently. She could not express her comprehension in words, and she loathed the passers-by that prevented her taking him to her heart. To him the shock was awful. Now he knew the meaning of various sensations that he had set down to "lassitude" and "depression"!

She squeezed the hand that rested on her arm.

"My poor boy!" she said.

"It's—it's rather hard lines, isn't it?"

She noted absently the brutal blue of the sky, the fierceness with which the bay sparkled. The noise of a little traffic in the road was deafening.

"You must stop in Cape Town and get well," she murmured. . . . "Are we going back by train?"

"Yes," he said, drearily. . . . "I suppose so."

His thought was, not that his sight was lost for ever; not that England would never now be any-

thing to him but a memory It was, that she and he must separate. *She* would go—perhaps a little later than they were to have gone together; perhaps much later. But she would go!

"It seems that it was fated," he said.

"What was fated?"

He had taken it for granted that she must be thinking of the same thing. But she was suffering with her own identity and had not remembered to view the situation as Duchêne.

"Why, that you were to leave me out here, after all."

"Leave you?" Then realising the position, she was staggered. Would Duchêne leave him? Or would she stay, regardless of everything else? She didn't know! It looked to her impossible

ing such a sacrifice without suspicion? As the train bore them homeward, she sat staring from the window, asking herself the question. She was now grateful for the presence of strangers; she did not want to speak.

On the platform Willy exclaimed:

"What do I care—we'll go together all the same! I'd rather be with you and die, Rosa, than be left alone and live. Don't let's think about it any more; we'll go as we'd arranged!"

"Are you mad?" she cried.

He persisted, but she would not listen to him. And all the afternoon she waited—trying to perceive whether he was ready to receive the suggestion that she craved to make.

During the evening both were very quiet. She had wheeled her armchair to the sofa where he lay, and stooped from time to time to kiss him. But her sympathy seemed empty to him without the words that he was yearning to hear; and to herself, till the words were spoken, the caresses that she could not restrain seemed almost an insult.

"When shall you sail?" he asked, breaking a long silence.

"When you are tired of me," she answered.

"Ah! You'll go before then!"

"Really?"

Coquetry appeared heartless to him. He wondered at her.

"For the first time I wish you were a nobody; I've been too vain, perhaps, of being loved by Rosa Duchêne. Now I'm punished for it—it's your position that comes between us. Her lover, or her career—what woman would hesitate?"

He did not know it, but in his tone was the reproach that was her clue. She shivered with joy before she spoke.

"I can't tell you what woman would hesitate," she said, with a laugh.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"Supposing——" she said, twisting a piece of his hair round her finger.

"'Supposing'?" he echoed, breathlessly.

than her Paris, than her life; if she cried to him; 'Willy, I'm ashamed! Forgive me, and let me stop!'—what do you think the man would say?"

"Rosa!" he gasped.

"I love you! I love you! I love you!" she muttered, straining him to her.

"You won't have so long to wait as you think —I shan't last more than three or four years, even here!"

"You shall live for ever," she swore; "you shall be immortal!"

They went, the following day, to view the little house that had delighted her so much. It was to be let furnished, and the old, white-haired negress that she had seen in the garden was prepared to remain as servant. They settled to take it then and there; and less than a week later they were installed.

The afternoon that they moved in, Polly went into town alone. She explained that there was something she wanted to buy—a shade for the parlour lamp; and Willy, who was vividly interested in the arrangement of their home although he could not see it, said, "Let it be a pretty colour, darling, something that'll make the room nice to look at in the evening!"

She left him on the *stoep,* where she would see him at the moment she reached the gate on her

return. But when her purchase was made, she did not hasten to rejoin him there. She turned up Adderley Street, instead, into an avenue. Near the foot there was a big building. It was the Public Library, and she entered it.

"Please," she said nervously to a gentleman who was standing behind the counter, "I want a criticism of a book of poems. It doesn't matter who wrote them, but they must be fine poems, and the critic must say that the poet's a genius. . . . Could you help me?"

The gentleman was taken aback.

"What kind of poet?" he inquired. "There have been many fine poets. . . . Do you mean a poet who is still living?"

"I really don't mind at all whether he's living

luding dozens of whom she had never heard. 'o her impatience, however, it soon seemed that ıe author found more faults than merits in even ıe best of them; nowhere could she come across xactly what she sought.

At last, after infinite pains, she selected a lot f appreciative paragraphs and managed to ovetail them into a fairly consistent whole. But panegyric on Byron, which she saw too late or it to be inserted satisfactorily, without her mitting a eulogy of Keats, detracted from her atisfaction.

"I'm very much obliged," she said to the li-rarian.

"Did you find what you wanted?" he asked uriously.

"Yes, thank you," she said; "at least, it'll do o go on with. But I shall often have to come gain."

She now proceeded to the station, and she eached the garden as the sun was setting. Willy vas still where she had left him. In her hand was copy of a London paper—a paper that he had ften referred to with awe and anticipation. She ut her sheet of foolscap on the rustic table, and ave him the paper.

"Sweetheart," she said, "I've brought you your rst review!"

He turned very pale; his voice was tremulous:

"What do they say? What's it in?"

She told him the paper's name. "I'll read it to you."

She took a seat by the table, and read.

" 'The minor poetry of the last few years,' she began, 'is of a strangely composite order. We can see that the long-popular Browning at length has become a potent force as the pioneer of a half-dramatic, half psychological method, whose adherents seek a change from the idyllic repose of Tennyson and his followers. With this intent, and with a strong leaning towards the art studies and convictions of the Rossetti group, a Neo-Romantic School has arisen, in which Mr. William Childers, whose *Reveries* is now under

knowledge that *Sic Itur ad Astra* is perfect of its kind. Take this and that exquisite ode, *To a Memory*, or *My Soul and I!* We call them poetry; poetry of the lasting sort, and attractive to successive generations. We believe that they will be read when many years have passed away; that they will be picked out and treasured by 'future compilers.'"

She paused, that he might breathe. Half an acre of Heaven had fallen into the Rondebosch garden and its glory was flooding him.

After a few seconds she bent again over her manuscript and read on, for several minutes, to the end.

When she had finished they did not speak. She lay her head on his breast, while his soul uttered thanksgiving on the heights to which her lie had lifted him. He had touched the pinnacle. He was thrilled with an intenser joy than comes to one man among millions—a joy so vast that few of us have the imagination to conceive it.

"Happy?"

"'Happy'? You, and Fame! Could life give any more?"

The brief Cape twilight was beginning to fall, and she guided him inside. She led him into a chair, and kissed him—his lips, and his sightless eyes.

"Your chair in our home," she murmured. "Oh, and the lamp-shade! Here it is."

"What colour did you choose, Rosa?"

"It's *couleur de rose!*" said Polly. And she put it on.

Some months later, on the border of Mowbray and Rondebosch, there lingered, in the last weeks of his life, a famous poet. He had never spoken with his publishers, but from time to time they wrote to him—in terms of respectful admiration; and then the celebrated actress, who shared his exile and acted as his amanuensis, read their letters to him, and cashed the very small drafts that they apologetically enclosed. At the primitive shops from which the villa was supplied its tenants were known as "Mr. and

ers, the contents might have been startling in
w of so much pride; he might, indeed, have
n pardoned the impression that he was look-
; at Mavor's Spelling Book, and a child's His-
y of England; but the poet held them with
oicing. To clasp them was rapture, second
ly to clasping his companion—a plain young
man whom he addressed by another woman's
me, and passionately believed most beautiful.

THE CHILD IN THE GARDEN

WHEN he reached the village of Thergrimabes at last—and after Athens the journey had been extremely trying—the curate gathered that Miss Netterville was out. As it was six months since they had met, and he had written to her that he was coming, her fiancé was vexed.

The innkeeper had laid eager hands on the portmanteau, and the traveller signed to him imperatively to put it down. "No, no," he exclaimed. "I must sleep somewhere else—if there's another inn to be found in the hole!" He remembered that it was useless to inquire for

oots. The heat, and the thought that Miss Net-
rville would probably return to luncheon—to
y nothing of the difficulty of seeking accommo-
ation without an interpreter—decided the curate
remain for awhile. "A lemon-squash," he
mmanded, at a venture, "bring me a lemon-
uash!" And then, as the order produced only
niles and shrugs, he raised a hand to his mouth
ith a gesture which he felt to be rather Southern
nd graceful.

The landlord responded volubly, and though
e brought wine instead, the Rev. Aloysius
haysle was too thirsty and fatigued to make ob-
ections to it. He sat in a little vine-clad arbour,
ith the wine on a bench, and his portmanteau
t his side, and was much inclined to wish that
e had not left Bedfordshire. The situation
as undignified from first to last, he felt. It was
o less than three years now since Gertrude had
romised to be his wife, and their marriage had
een delayed by nothing but the scientific cold-
ess of the young woman's disposition. When a
irl who was betrothed to a Church of England
lergyman, with private means, allowed him to
ine for her in his parish while she devoted her-
elf to the study of archæology abroad, it was
ime for the clergyman to put his foot down,

thought Aloysius. And that was what he had travelled from Bedfordshire to do.

Meanwhile, Miss Netterville was trudging along the road to greet him, with a frown on her intellectual brow. She was quite aware that she was treating him unfairly, and surmised pretty shrewdly what he had come to say, and it would all be a great bore. The idea of marriage had never attracted her at any time; Man—other than prehistoric—had always been rather repellent to her than the reverse: and she wondered why she had been weak enough to disturb her life by becoming engaged. She approached the arbour with no enthusiasm.

"Hallo, Al!" she said; "I didn't expect you so early. Have you been here long?"

"I've been here the best part of an hour," re-

"I'm afraid that there's nothing else resembling an hotel for miles," she said; "Thergrimabes is rather primitive, you know."

"It seems so primitive that I'm dismayed to find you in it; but, with all your contempt for the conventions, I suppose you don't want us to be talked about? Surely you understand that it's out of the question for us both to sleep under the same roof, in the circumstances?"

"Oh, my dear Aloysius," she cried, *"please!* Spare me the artificialities! Go to one of the goatherds' cottages, if any of them has a bed to offer and you care to lie in it, but don't talk to me as if I were an ingénue in Bedfordshire—I've got beyond that sort of thing. Have they given you anything to eat? Lunch'll be ready directly —we may as well go inside."

"Gertrude," he began strenuously, "I've something to say to you, and it's just as well to say it at once. Your letters haven't been very satisfactory—over and over again you've left a question of mine unanswered. We've been engaged for three years now, and I want you to fix a day for our wedding. Will you marry me next month?"

"Next month? Oh, no, it's impossible!"

"But why? Frankly, dear, I am losing patience. Why is it always 'impossible'? Mar-

riage needn't interfere with your work—you can write quite as easily when we're married as you do now."

"In Bedfordshire?" she said, with a fine smile.

"I don't approve of the tone in which you mention Bedfordshire!" exclaimed Aloysius. "I presume that a book may be written in Bedfordshire as well as in Thergrimabes, or in Egypt, or any other of the remote places that you've a craze for? The whole thing is preposterous. It looks a little like affectation. It would be preposterous for a girl of twenty-eight to roam about the world unprotected, in any case——"

"Unprotected?" she echoed, "unprotected? You are talking a language that I've forgotten. Really, your notions are the most antique things

proper indeed. You must remember that you are young and pretty, and——"

"Oh, don't!" she said wearily. "What an odious word! I'm not accustomed to consider my personal appearance, but I do trust that I'm not 'pretty.'"

"My sister often says that you would be extremely pretty," returned Aloysius, "if you didn't strain your hair back, and paid more attention to your clothes. But your prettiness is not the point; the main thing is our engagement—you haven't the right to behave like this, you aren't free to indulge your eccentricities, you owe a duty to Me."

Miss Netterville lit a cigarette, and gazed thoughtfully across a mulberry-tree. Characteristically, she had made no change in her costume on the day of her lover's arrival—and she had stated a fact when she declared herself indifferent to her appearance as a rule; but in spite of the ill-fitting blouse, the unbecomingly dressed blonde hair, in spite even of the coldly intellectual eyes, she looked a desirable woman. A psychologist might have thought she looked also a woman with potentialities. But Aloysius was not a psychologist; he saw only the obvious—and not the whole of that.

"Of course I am to blame," she said at last.

"I know. But then I never pretended to the kind of temperament that you admire. To me, my paramount duty must always be my work; to you, my paramount duty is to do the sort of thing that any other woman could do equally well. It is curious that I appeal to you. To be quite candid, love in its physical aspects is unpleasant to me, quite apart from the fact that marriage would be an abominable hindrance to my studies. I have no gift for domesticity; the prospect of district-visiting appals me, and tea-parties bore me to death. And I have no leaning towards maternity. I oughtn't to have promised to marry at all—I have more important things to do in my life. There are shoals of women capable of adding to the world's population, but the

ıd that you did not express the views that you ɔ hold with such unusual bluntness—but, for ɔod or ill, I love you. You must admit that to reak off our engagement after all this time ould be to treat me cruelly? I really don't now what I could say to people!"

"You could say that you had given me up—erybody would consider you were quite justi-ed."

"I am not in the habit of telling falsehoods, ertrude; I should have to acknowledge that you ıd thrown me over—at the end of three years, ter I had travelled to Greece to see you; I had ɔked forward to a tenderer conclusion to the ɔurney, I must say!" He, too, regarded the ulberry-tree. "I—I am not unreasonable, I ite appreciate your interest in your work—chæology is a very interesting subject, I am ıre, and——"

Miss Netterville made a gesture of impatience. Please don't patronise the Ages! You mean ell, but it's irritating."

"I was about to explain that if next month ould be inconvenient to you on literary grounds, would cheerfully wait until the month after," id Aloysius, with pained surprise. "Let us ɔth make concessions—let us say in two months' me! Eh, dearest? We have both let our

tongues run away with us, haven't we—both been a little hasty? What do you say? You shall share my study—you shall have your own shelves in it. Only the other day I was looking at a little bamboo desk in the High Street, and thinking how admirably it would suit you. *I'd* write my sermons while *you* wrote your book, and sometimes we might turn round and read each other what we had done. Wouldn't it be cosy, now? Doesn't it sound pleasant?"

She shuddered, and nerved herself for a supreme effort.

"Al!" she stammered, "it has been a shocking mistake; I can't marry you."

And the curate did not sleep anywhere at all in Thergrimabes—he left it the same evening.

and a sprinkling of hovels. Half-naked children swarm in the dust, and beg of any misguided tourist who happens to stray there from the towns beyond; goatherds, dignified in their rags, roll cigarettes pensively, and prematurely old women occasionally appear at the doors and shade their eyes in the sun. These are almost the only signs of activity in Thergrimabes. For the rest, you have silence and the mountains.

Miss Netterville made many expeditions up the mountains; equipped with a scribbling block and a fountain pen, she often wrote among them. One evening—she had now written thirty thousand words, and Aloysius had been gone about a month—she heard the slow sound of hoofs. Two quaintly garbed men were riding down the track. They had evidently just observed her, and as she turned, one of them waved his sombrero to her, with an impudent smile. He was the taller of the pair, a swarthy, handsome fellow, with laughing eyes, and a big moustache that curled above full, sensual lips. She bent over her manuscript again with a frown, wondering why his glance had affected her so queerly.

The men quickened their pace, and then dismounted and advanced to her. Her emotion was pure fear now; she got up, trembling.

"There is nothing to do—she is alone!" said

the smaller of the two, a weedy villain, with a squint.

"You will find you have more to do than you think," she boasted, coolly; "I am armed."

"So you understand Greek, do you?" exclaimed his companion. "That's all the better—I like a girl to be able to talk to me! You are going to have a ride with me, my beauty. If you don't come quietly, I shall have to be rough! How is it to be?"

He learnt how it was to be at once; Miss Netterville struck at the handsome face straight from the shoulder—throwing her body into the blow with capital effect—and took to flight as he reeled back. But the next instant he rushed after her; he seized her before she had covered a

"*Anathema ton!* What a spitfire you are!" he panted. "Look what your fist has done! Don't you think you owe me a kiss for that?"

"You brute," she gasped, "I'd like to kill you!"

"You're a regular devil of a woman—I didn't know they made them like you with that coloured hair."

"You're hurting my arm," she moaned. "I can't bear it any longer."

"Will you sit still if I don't hold so tight?"

"I couldn't escape even if I jumped off."

"That's true," said the brigand, "but I don't want the job of getting you up again; if I had your weight in gold, my dear, I'd lead an easy life!" He slackened his grasp a little, and flashed his bold, impudent smile at her—the smile that had shamed her so hotly when she first saw him. "Come, it's not disagreeable to be hugged by a man? Own up! It would be very shocking if you could help it, but you can't; remind yourself that you're not to blame, and then you can have a good time!"

"Where are you taking me?"

"To my hotel," said the facetious outlaw.

"What do you mean?"

"Call it a 'cave' if you like—I'm not proud, and I have a fancy for a quiet spot. But there's room enough for you in it—and food and wine.

their embrace were right. Insensibly she yielded to it more and more. It grew less repugnant to her, and even—— With a shock she realised what she had been feeling, and shivered with self-disgust.

"We have arrived," said the brigand; he carried her inside. "It is nice to carry you, now that you don't struggle," he added.

On entering, she was plunged into darkness so intense that she could discern nothing whatever. Then she found herself borne into a cave illumined by pendant oil lamps, and furnished with considerable comfort. Beyond was a second cleft of light, and she perceived that the cave resembled a suite of rooms communicating with one another by means of apertures in the rock. The man who had assisted in her capture rejoined her now, and three others appeared, who saluted her with quiet satisfaction. There was no excitement, no hint of violence; to her surprise, her reception was as formal as if she had arrived at an inn—as formally as innkeepers the brigands prepared to keep her prisoner.

Excepting the captain! The captain, as has been seen, did his business with bonhomie. If not "the mildest mannered man that ever cut a throat," at least he was the most jovial. No gallant ever filled a lady's glass, or peeled her figs

with more consideration, and when he told the company how valiantly she had defended herself, he testified to her prowess with so much humour that she couldn't restrain a smile.

At the same time, it was with no little trepidation that she found herself alone with him again when the meal was finished. It proved necessary, to confess that she had no friends in Greece with whom he could communicate, and, moreover, that none of her friends in England was in a position to ransom her; he twirled his moustache thoughtfully when she explained.

"No lover?" he questioned. "Rubbish, you mustn't tell me that you have no lover—a woman like you!"

"It is true," she declared.

that had cost thirty shillings. He looked at it, and gave a shrug.

"Is that what you offer me to let you go? I think you are worth more."

"I have nothing else to offer. Besides, although I haven't any friends to pay a ransom, there are plenty of people to miss me; the search might not do me much good, but it would probably end in your being shot. As you can't hope to make any money by me, you'd be wise to set me free."

"You have brains, too, under that lovely hair," he remarked, appreciatively. "May I offer you a cigarette?"

"No," she said; but she eyed the packet wistfully, and wished that her case were in her pocket.

"Now you are being a little donkey! Why should I wait to drug you with a cigarette when I could tap you on the head with one of these?" He touched the pistols in the sash wound round his sturdy waist. "You see I am smoking them myself—take your choice among the lot!"

Miss Netterville and the brigand smoked in silence for a few moments. Then——

"Every man is a fool once," he repeated meditatively, "but there must be a limit to his folly. If I set you free like this, what sort of ass would

you think me? No better than the wooer who let you change your mind!"

"I should think you had acted like a brave and generous fellow!"

"Ah, you want to flatter me into it, you cunning cat!" he said. "Do you know that I could love you desperately, my beauty with the yellow hair? I believe I fell in love with you when I felt your fist! I like you for having hit me—I should like you to hit me again. Come and hit me again, beauty with the yellow hair—or sing me a love song. Do you sing?"

"No," she murmured.

"It's a pity, for you are a passionate woman—you would have sung well. Why did you start?"

She had started to discover that this bandit knew her better than she had known herself un-

ıade. The deep voice was untrained, but rich ınd sweet. After the first surprise, Miss Netter-ille forgot who it was that sang—it was an art-st on the stage, a lover below a window; almost t was her own lover, whom she loved! The mu-ic knocked at her heart, and no trace of the smile hat discomfited her so much was on the hand-ome face now—sentiment idealised the ruffian.

When he finished she was very pale.

"Are *you* as cold as the woman of the song?" ıe whispered.

"Yes," she muttered, "I *am* as cold."

"You lie," he cried, "you love me!" And the ıext instant she snatched a pistol from his sash.

"I'll kill myself!" she gasped.

She thought her wrist was broken as she ropped the weapon. He picked it up and paced he cave with agitation, smiting his chest, and jaculating. Meanwhile, the English lady mar-elled why she didn't loathe him.

"Will you go?" he exclaimed, suddenly. You shall go now, if you wish it; I swear you hall be guided back. I love you, I adore you, implore you to stay! Do you wish to go?"

She bowed her head—"I wish to go."

He called to the men, and she heard their won-erment, their departing footsteps—at last the lip-clop sound of hoofs outside. All this time

the captain had stood brooding silently; now he raised his head, and she saw with emotion that tears were in his eyes.

"Good-bye, *zoe mou,*" he said.

"Oh!" she faltered. "Did you *really* love me then?"

He opened his arms, and Miss Netterville gave herself to them with impetuous lips.

"All is ready for the lady!" came the shout.

"They are waiting for you," said the brigand sadly.

"There—there's no hurry for a minute," Miss Netterville heard herself reply.

Before she left him he assured her that her escort might be trusted; and no mishap befell her

ite game, the vicar's wife might think less often of her strange experience; but the boy tilts his straw hat like a sombrero, and sticks a pop-gun in his sash, and pretends that the summer-house is the "brigands' cave." At such times, Aloysius remarks humorously that "a little brigand is inappropriate to a vicarage garden." And the lady's eyes are wide.

A LETTER TO THE DUCHESS

"You said to me last night, Duchess, 'You are a great musician, Socoloski, but a great musician may be a great fool!' I had vexed you. If I should not know that, forgive me; perhaps it is common of me to recognise that I vexed you—I shall always be ignorant of the best manners. Pray be indulgent to my ignorance, pray let me write to you boldly, because I have something to say.

"But how difficult it is—I am a vulgarian, who can express himself only by his violin! I want to say that when you looked at me so kindly, I was

because I loved her, Duchess, and I had much to think of when I left. To understand what was in my heart when I reached your drawing-room, you must read my love-story from the beginning —my very vulgar love-story that will disgust you.

"Most of the things that you have seen about me in the papers were false—anecdotes invented by my agent. The public ask for anecdotes of their favourite artists, and it is business to give the public what they want. I generally play the music that they want, though it is seldom the music that I like best. I say that most of the things you have heard about me were false, but this much is true—my father was a peasant, and I have fiddled in a fair.

"I was happy. I have been told of artists who suffered agonies in their youth, always tortured by ambition and dismayed by their obscurity. With me it was quite different. I was more joyous in a tent than I am now on the platforms. I even knew at the time that I was happy. That says much! Ungrateful, perhaps I sound to you? Still, I shall be frank.

"I was thirteen when I first heard the words, 'You will be famous.' I was on my way to buy some apples, and the discussion that detained me bored me a great deal. So ignorant was I, that I

swear to you 'Fame' said no more to me than that one day I should fiddle with a roof of wood over my head, and that storekeepers and farmers would spell my name from a bill at the doors.

"My patron had me educated. To him I owe, not only my position in the musical world, but the fact that I am able to write this letter. I shall not weary you by describing the years of study. When I began to understand what lay before me, my apprenticeship looked an endless martyrdom; more than once I was at the point of fleeing from it. There is, they say, a special department of Providence for the protection of fools; it is Providence, no wisdom of my own, I have to thank that I am not still a vagrant scraping to

anything, it is for the devotion with which I worked during the five years that followed.

"Well, I made a furore. Audiences rained roses on me and struggled to reach the platform. Great ladies invited me to their receptions, and bent their eyes on me as if I were a god. I found it frightfully confusing; under my veneer, under my fashionable suit, I was still the peasant who had held his cap for coppers. I discovered that it was necessary for me to do more than master my art—that I was required to say interesting things to people who frightened me; my popularity suffered a little because I could not do it. The agent was furious at my bashfulness. 'You must speak to the ladies as if you were in love with them,' he told me; 'or if you cannot do that, be rude! Make an effect *somehow*. You answer as if you were a servant.'

"Many of my eccentric remarks that you have heard, Duchess, have been composed with difficulty, and practised with care. The world will not have us as we are. My agent often returns a portrait-poster of me to the printer, with the instructions, 'Put more soul into the eyes'!

"I am coming to my love-story. It was no further back than last year that I first met her. I had given a recital at Blithepoint, and was re-

maining there for a few days' rest. One evening I went to a variety entertainment in the pavilion on the pier.

"In the bill were three girls described as 'The Three Sisters Clicquot.' They appeared as theatre attendants—the programme sellers who show you to your box—and sang, to a rather plaintive air, that they once hoped to be stars themselves. And then, having blossomed into gauze and spangles, they burlesqued melodrama. After their turn, two of the trio came into the stalls, and, by chance, I spoke to one of them; a Strong Man had broken a sixpence in halves, and thrown the pieces over the footlights—the girl asked me to let her see the piece that I picked up.

"I do not suppose I exchanged twenty words

This is my card.' From a battered purse she took a card on which was printed:

Miss Betty Williams

The Three Sisters Clicquot

"We were near the entrance to the buffet. 'Will you come and have a drink?' I asked.

" 'Oh, I don't think I will, thanks,' she said. 'I'm waiting for Eva—I might miss her.'

" 'Oh, you'd better come,' I said.

"We went in and sat down at one of the tables. She did not strike me as particularly good-looking then; the spell of her face lay in its changefulness, and as yet I had not seen it change, for her capabilities as an actress were of the slightest. I saw merely a pale, slim girl, becomingly dressed in some dark stuff that was rather shabby; when she lifted her brandy-and-soda, a finger-tip showed through a glove. I wondered why I had brought her in, and was glad that there was no crowd to recognize me. It wasn't till she told me so that I was sure she recognised me herself.

"She said, 'I have never heard you play; I

'"Give us a chance!' she laughed. 'No, but ther doesn't make much by the shop any more she's a costumier—and there are the kids to ng up—I've two young brothers. She did well ce; I used to go up West, to try for engage- nts, dressed to kill—she lent me the models to t on. I often didn't have twopence in my cket, but I looked a treat. The only thing was, vas so afraid of its raining—then we couldn't l the model.'

'"You've had hard times?' I said, interested.

'She nodded gravely. 'Rough! I've always nd very good pals, though. When I went into chorus at the Regalia, I and a friend of e hadn't a cent between us for bus fares; and e was an old Johnnie—one of the syndicate ho took to us. Quite straight! He said, k here, I know you two girls aren't getting gh to eat; I've booked a table at the Troc, ou're both to lunch there right through the sals. If you can't get away for lunch, it's dinner; but one square meal a day the two must have regularly, or there'll be rows. it isn't to be a meal for more than two!"'

ce lit with laughter. 'There were some the chorus just as stony as we were; my ould lunch one day, and I'd lunch the e'd each take a boy in turn! But the

old man found out what was going on—and the Troc was off! . . . I've had cases of champagne sent me, if you please! He was a wine merchant's son—wanted to marry me; his screw in the business was about a pound a week. Nice little fellow. He always called me "Jack." He used to say, "I can't come in the pit to see the show to-night—I haven't got a bob; but have a case of champagne, Jack! I'll send you one round—it doesn't cost me anything." '

"I liked it. For years I had conversed with only two kinds of women—the women who awed me, and the women who were awed. In five minutes I was as spontaneous as she. Her tones were, for the most part, very pleasant, and now that she was animated, the play of her features

the moonlight I knew that the pavilion was packed.

" 'That's Heracles, the Strong Man,' she said, as we listened again. 'What did you think of him? He's in love with my "sister"—I mean Eva Jones. He wanted to kiss her, and she put on side—oh, Eva was very haughty! "Sir, how dare you?" He had hold of her finger, and he drew her to him as if she had been a piece of paper—it was so funny, to see her going. He worships the ground she walks on, fact! That was the reason his challenge night was a frost—didn't you hear about his challenge night? He bet that no twelve men in Blithepoint could pull him over the line. Then he got drunk, because she wouldn't have anything to do with him—and they pulled him all over the place. It cost him ten pounds, besides his reputation. He cried. "Ah, little girl," he said to her, "it is all through you!" '

"It was amazing, that on the stage she could not act. As I heard her tell this story, I would have sworn she was a born comédienne. The exaggerated dignity of Miss Jones, its ludicrous collapse, the humiliation of the Strong Man, she brought the scenes before me. 'Go on,' I begged, 'talk some more!'

"But before she could talk much more, the

obdurate Miss Jones appeared. I was presented, and wished them 'Good-night.' I could have seen them to their lodging, but—well, Miss Jones's attire was not to my taste, and she had forgotten to take the make-up off her eyes.

"I am writing more than I intended; I had no idea that my explanation would be so long!

"The next night I did walk to their lodging with them. It was Saturday, their last night in the town; on Monday they were to sing in a London suburb. Miss Jones had to leave a parcel with an acquaintance at the Theatre Royal, and, in her absence, Betty Williams and I paced the street alone. A quarter of an hour, perhaps. She was looking forward to the week at home. She was serious to-night; she talked to me of her mother and the 'boys.' I said I hoped she would

Sisters Clicquot were in Derby. Each week I bought the paper to learn the movements of The Three Sisters Clicquot; and each week I told myself it would be absurd of me to follow her so far. Eventually, I followed her to Yorkshire.

"What a town! The grey grim streets, the clatter of the clogs, the women's hopeless faces under the shawls! I put up at a commercial hotel—there was nothing else—and was directed to the Empire.

"Their name was far down the programme: 'Number 10: The Three Sisters Clicquot.' I began to think that we should never reach it. Number 8 proved to be a conjurer, and my heart sank as I beheld the multitude of articles that he meant to use before he finished. Number 9 was a troupe of acrobats; a dozen times they made their bows and skipped off—only to skip on again and do some more. At last! The number '10' was displayed; the little plaintive symphony stole from the orchestra, the three girls filed on—Eva Jones, next Miss Clicquot, then Betty.

"I wondered if she would notice me. I saw her start—she smiled. I was so pleased that I had gone! We talked presently, in the passage under the stage. She was very much surprised; I did not tell her that I was there only to meet her again. Once more I walked with her and Eva

Jones to their door. In the morning I called on them.

"I stayed in the place four or five days. There were luncheons in the private room that I had been able to secure at the hotel. I went to tea with them at their apartments. In fine, I was very much in love, and I knew that I had been a fool. I knew it for a reason which will be difficult for you to credit, Duchess; this girl, who took a brandy-and-soda with a stranger in a bar, who accepted little presents from others, and dined with men who had only one motive for inviting her, remained perfectly virtuous. In different classes there are different codes—she did not regard her behaviour as wrong; more, if she had committed the act which she knew to be

fellow asks me to lunch, I go; I say I'll go with another girl—that tells him everything, doesn't it? I swear to God I've only let one man kiss me in my life—and then I only did it out of pity, because he was so cut up. A man is never dangerous till he's beaten. Do you know that?' Well, I was not prepared to marry her, and she could be nothing to me if I didn't; I left Yorkshire with the firm intention of never seeing her any more.

"However, I missed her dreadfully, and at the end of a month, I succumbed again. I went to Lancashire this time. The same impatience in my stall, the same quiver of expectancy at the plaintive introduction that was so familiar now, the same throb as the three girls appeared. Why should I bore you with details? I was with her all day, every day. Tea and chatter in the lodging became an institution, and we grew serious only when the melancholy dusk signalled her departure for the hall. She was not fascinated by her career: 'How I hate going in!' she murmured sometimes, as we reached the artists' entrance, with the group of loafers spitting on the kerb. And I sat in front, just to see the turn, and talk to her again between the first performance and the second—in the passage at the foot of the dirty steps, where such draughts

poured through the slamming door, and the gas-jet blew crooked in its cage.

"She was fond of me; I knew it. I had only to ask her to marry me—I knew that her consent wouldn't be due to my position. There were moments when I was very near to asking her. But I was Socoloski, and she—a third-rate variety artist. I shuddered to think what the Society ladies would say if their god stooped—for that matter, what everybody would say. No woman could have been more different from the wife I had pictured. Yet no woman had ever been so truly a companion to me. Always a bohemian at heart, I had naturally fallen in love with a bohemian; but when he draws a portrait of the wife that he desires, every man is conven-

first, I still glanced at the *Encore,* just to know where she was, but before long I denied myself this, too. My American tour started soon afterwards. The change helped me while it lasted, but when I came back the struggle was as bad as ever. Six months had passed, yet every day I hungered to see her. I was desperate. I didn't know what to do to keep myself in hand.

"Duchess, my motive in addressing you is to write the truth, even the truths that one blushes to acknowledge. When I welcomed the dawn of your interest in me, I turned to you as a chance of forgetting *her*—I did not mean to prove so obtuse as I appeared last night. Perhaps, a gentleman might have seized the chance, too, but, I suppose, only a cad would own it to you afterwards.

"And I couldn't forget! I never responded to your gaze without wishing it were hers. I resented the very gowns that you received me in, because *she* was poorly dressed. I hated myself for being in your drawing-room while *she* was trudging through the rain.

"My God! it's awful to think like that of a woman—to have the thought of her beset you as you open your eyes in the morning; to think till you're worn out with thinking of her, and pray

to think of something else; to think of her till you want to escape from your own mind!

"Tolerate me a little longer—I have nearly done!

"Last Saturday, it was a year since I had seen her. I broke down—I was ready to make her my wife. I wondered if she would look as pleased as she used to look when she saw me—and then I froze at the thought that The Sisters Clicquot might be abroad, that they might have vanished altogether. When I searched the *Encore* again, I—— There were emotions!

" 'The Three Sisters Clicquot'! I found it. They were in Portsmouth on Saturday; yesterday they were to be in town. It was impossible for me to go to Portsmouth; my prayer was that,

until the turn was over, so—just as I used to do—I sat down to wait in the stalls. Just as I used to do, I read the name of 'The Three Sisters Clicquot' in a programme and wished that the preceding turn didn't last so long.

"I had taken it for granted that they would be giving a different song now—and my heart tightened at the greeting of that familiar symphony again. For an instant I could not look at the stage. I knew, with my head bent, the moment when the three girls filed on; I knew where they were moving, how they were standing—now the note that they were going to sing! I looked up for Betty's face—and saw a stranger.

"Oh, the horrible woman, the low, horrible woman! And I had to watch her, I watched her in spite of myself. The audience laughed and shouted while I sat there with the sickness of terror in me, while I watched that horrible woman posturing in Betty's place, and wearing the frock that Betty had worn.

"Afterwards, I found the artists' entrance, as I had proposed to find it—only I asked for Eva, instead of Betty. She came down to me, smiling, in her stage costume.

" 'Who'd have thought of seeing *you!*' she exclaimed, as we shook hands; 'I was just going to change.'

"'How are you?' I said dully, and our eyes questioned each other.

"'I suppose you know about Betty?' she said.

"I could only look at her.

"'She's dead,' she told me.

"The last turn was on—a comedian was bellowing doggerel. I listened to bars of it before I whispered, 'Dead?'

"'She got typhoid when we were in Lincoln—she died last month. Hadn't you heard?'

"'No. . . . It's still "The Three Sisters Clicquot" on the bills.'

"'Oh, yes, of course—it's always "The Three Sisters Clicquot." . . . The new girl's not as good as Betty was—do you think so?'

"'I don't know.'

"'Well,' she said, 'I must get along and change. Buck up!'

"And then I went to you, your Grace; I had promised to play to your guests, and I could not break my word. But you may understand what I was feeling while I played—that my thoughts were in a grave. And when we were alone, you may understand that, though you are charming, and beautiful, and a duchess, and exalted me by your caprice, I could not be guilty of that—outrage, that adultery towards the dead.

"Most humbly I beg you to believe that I am grateful for the honour you have done a man who was unworthy—who was loyal neither to you nor her. You will never pardon me for this letter. Good-bye."

THE PRINCE IN THE FAIRY TALE

"The carriage is at the door, Madam." How strange that still sounds when the solemn butler says it—to me, Rosie McLeod! I go, wrapped in furs, down the great staircase, pass the two footmen—whose pomposity, if I may own the truth, rather frightens me—and enter my carriage in a dream. For a few minutes my grandeur seems unreal; I am remembering winters when I used to shiver in a spring jacket, and

always a delicate, sweet-faced woman sitting by the fire, and a dark slip of a girl sketching at a table covered by a faded green cloth. The woman was my mother; the girl was I. I know now that I had very little talent, but I meant to be an artist. When I sold my copy of "Shoeing the Bay Mare" one morning, while I was working at the National, I was prouder of myself than I have ever been since. Pray don't think I am vain of it now; copies of that were rather easy to sell, and the girls in my time were accordingly eager for their turn to begin it; I only mention the matter because it was the first and the last money that my mother saw me earn. Dear little mother! But we were very happy together, weren't we, although we were poor? Dear little mother, if you were living to-day, what lovely, lovely things you should have! . . .

At her death I was left quite alone. It is true that I had some second cousins, but I had not met them, and they showed no desire to meet me then. From one source and another I had about three hundred pounds, and in my ignorance I expected to support myself by my brush before the sum had melted. When I was free of the flat I took a lodging in Bayswater, and continued to study at a life-class. Excepting that I worked,

and hoped, and very often cried, there is nothing to tell you of the next two years.

Then one afternoon I saw Miss Niblett in Kensington Gardens. She was an artist who had long been an acquaintance of ours. As far back as I remember she used to drop in to tea about twice a year, and talk of the great things she was going to do. She never seemed to grow any older, nor to do the great things. She was a spirited, chirpy little woman, and when she settled in Paris both my mother and I had missed her occasional visits very much. In the Broad Walk she greeted me as brightly as ever, and we strolled to the Round Pond, and talked for an hour. She was returning in a week's time, and I heard that she was living there in the cheapest

"I don't know. . . . For one thing, I can't speak French."

"Tut," cried Miss Niblett. "Hundreds of the girls don't speak French. You'll learn." For a minute we sat silent, gazing at the toy ships sailing across the pond. Then she added briskly, "You had better come!"

"All right," I said. And that was how I went.

Yes, I went to study in Paris, and to live in the queerest fashion imaginable. Our rooms were up ninety-eight stairs of a dingy house in a dilapidated court. At six o'clock in the morning the court used to wake, and be so exceedingly busy—and cheerful withal—that anyone there would have been ashamed to lie abed. To begin with, there was the rushing of water outside, for tap there was none, and one by one the tenants clattered to a pump with a bucket, to obtain their supply for the day. Then the hawkers made their appearance, each with his own peculiar chant. "It arrives, it arrives, the mackerel! Who wishes for my fine mackerel this morning?" And "The mussels! the mussels most delicious!" And "Some milk—some fresh milk?" And I mustn't forget the noise that was made by shaking out the rugs from every window. I have never seen a city that opens its eyes so good-humouredly as

Paris. In pictures it is always shown to us at night with its myriad lamps shining, or in the afternoon when it is frivolous, and its fountains flash; but, in my own little unimportant opinion, if one would know Paris at its sweetest and its best, one should get up very, very early, and behold it smiling when it wakes to work.

I have told you that we lived up ninety-eight stairs; I must tell you something about the people who lived on the lower landings. Of course the lower the landing, the higher the rent, but none of our neighbors had an air of opulence, need I say it? All of them bustled to the pump with pails, all of them cooked their own meals; and it was rather a rare occurrence, I believe, for everybody in that house to cook a dinner on the

men; one of them wrote verses, and his companion made sketches for some of the papers. And —there was another American, who had moved in while Miss Niblett was in London. So good-looking!

He was about seven-and-twenty, and, oh! he was shabby. It made my heart ache to see the threadbare clothes he wore, even there where I had come to take threadbare clothes for granted. I used to meet him at the pump sometimes, and then he always insisted on carrying my pail for me. I felt horrid to let him do it. I guessed he didn't have enough to eat and needed all his strength to drag his own pail up the stairs. Not that he showed any signs of weakness. He would mount beside me as gaily as if he liked the work and the bucket were no more than a feather-weight. He seemed quite strong and happy, and —— I have told you how nice-looking he was, haven't I?

A girl cannot allow a young man to carry a pail of water up ninety-eight stairs for her without thanking him. I mean it was impossible for me *just* to say "Thank you," as if he had handed me the toast, or picked up my sunshade. Of course we spoke as we went up the stairs. He told me he was an art student, like me, and I

thought that no poor young man had ever been more courageous and contented with his lot—if one call a little a "lot." He talked as if he loved the life. To listen to him one would have imagined that poverty—"bohemianism" *he* termed it—was a kind of treat—a privilege for the Select, like a ticket for the Royal Enclosure. I used to forget to pity him till I looked at his coat.

"I think you are very brave," I couldn't help saying once.

"Brave?" he exclaimed. "Why, how's that? Where's the hardship? I think it's just the right thing for a man to carry home his bread for breakfast, and dine for a franc when he's flush. It's glorious—teaches him to be independent. And you?" he went on in a different tone. "Is

so charming as the hand," he murmured, "is it?"

"It's glorious," I declaimed, "for a girl to carry home her bread for breakfast, and dine for a franc when she's flush."

"No, it isn't," he said. "For a girl it's a different thing altogether. You'll excuse my contradicting you? Besides, even a franc wants earning when you have no allowance from home."

"I shall sell my Work," I declared valiantly. In those days I always spelt my work with a capital W.

"I guess pictures take a deal of selling sometimes."

"I suppose you mean that you don't think I shall ever paint well?"

"I haven't seen anything you have done," he answered; "how could I mean that? . . . Here we are at the top!"

We had reached our door, and Miss Niblett was standing there, a stiff little figure of disapproval. Considering that I was only showing the young man simple civility in return for his extreme kindness, I am bound to say that Miss Niblett's later remarks were absurd. Miss Niblett said she should go downstairs with the pail herself in future.

When she came up the next morning I was

all ears. Was she alone? . . . No, I could hear her speaking; and then there were steps, as someone turned away. "That Mr. Martin is certainly polite," she said, as she entered; "he insisted on bringing it up for me."

"*Who* did?" I inquired loftily.

"That Mr. Martin," she repeated. "Who else do you suppose would take the trouble?"

"Oh! *I* didn't know his name *was* 'Martin,'" I explained. "You seem to be on very friendly terms with him."

"Tut," said Miss Niblett. "Don't be ridiculous, child, and make haste with the coffee, do!"

Though I did not meet Mr. Martin at the pump any more, I very often chanced to meet him on my way home from the art school. Each

way—but I was sure his buoyancy was just put on to hide his sufferings.

When I had been living in the court for about two months, the sight of his coat, and the idea of his privations, proved too bad to be borne. We had become such comrades by then—for the walk from the school took a long time, especially if one didn't walk very fast—that I thought he would let me speak like a sister to him.

"Mr. Martin," I murmured one day as we went home, "I want you to do me a great favour, please."

"Why, certainly," he said. "Right now! What is it?"

"Well," I said, "we are both students, and we are very good friends, and it's all nonsense for you to reply that because I'm a girl you can't regard me as a real chum." And when I had stammered that, I turned red, and gazed at the tips of my shoes.

"But I haven't replied anything of the sort," he said, with a laugh; "I'm waiting to hear what you want me to do."

"You won't be offended?" I asked.

"I'm sure I could never be offended with *you*," he said earnestly.

"Or hurt?" I added.

"I'm sure *you* would never hurt me."

"Well, then, I want you to let me lend you a little money till things are better. Will you?"

His eyes widened at me; and then he—blushed. He did, he blushed; I saw the colour spread right up to his temples. I hated myself, though I had done my best to say it all delicately.

"I am very, very grateful to you," said Mr. Martin. "Believe me, I'm not in need of money. But you're a chum, indeed."

"Oh, you're too proud to confess," I gulped—and there was a lump in my throat that I couldn't swallow.

We were crossing one of the bridges, and I stopped and looked at the sun sinking, while I tried to blink my tears back. He stood there by

to put. . . . Dear little chum, do you care for me?"

"Yes," I told him.

"Enough to wait till a pauper can afford to marry you?"

"Yes," I told him.

"I love you," said Mr. Martin, "with all my heart!"

And the boats were sailing down the river, and a crowd was on the bridge, but I couldn't see them. In all Paris there was no one but ourselves. We were alone in the sunset—he and I!

I knew what Miss Niblett would say, and she said it—"Tut!" She warned me that I was doing a rash, an improvident thing. And after she had reproached herself for bringing me to France, and prophesied a hopeless waiting and the workhouse for me by turns, she hugged me splendidly, and wished me happiness. There you have Miss Niblett!

Then my fiancé was invited up to supper, and we were merry. I was annoyed to see that, while I was making the salad, she had examined him about his prospects. Of course I did see it, when I came back, by his embarrassed look and Miss Niblett's air of dissatisfaction. Still I repeat that we were merry that evening, although I could not help regretting that I had so often

spoken to her of my fear that he didn't get enough to eat. It wasn't quite nice, while we sat at supper, to think she was reflecting that a substantial meal was by way of being a novelty to my lover. It hurt me, that.

Good little Miss Niblett! Though she had let me prepare the supper so that she might have a chance to pester him with questions, she made amends by clearing the things away herself. And shut the door behind her! That was the first time he kissed me. After all that has happened since, the scene remains clear and living to me—the little lamp-lit room, half studio, half parlour, the scent of the mignonette in the open window, and the Promised Land I saw beyond. When I am old and grey, it will be living to me

joked outside a jeweller's window, pretending to choose the costliest of engagement rings; like vagrants we loitered by a great house where a reception was being held. Yes, we stood there on the pavement and watched the grand people arriving; and for the first time for hours I remembered we were poor.

"Why aren't *we* going to a party? How lovely it would be!"

"Are you keen on parties?" my lover asked. "Perhaps I could take you to one this week. Shall I try?"

"A party like that?" I laughed. "Yes, please!"

"Ah, well," he replied, "I can't guarantee that it will be quite like that. Still, I guess it will be rather fun. Will Miss Niblett go, too?"

"I?" she exclaimed. "Don't talk nonsense!"

"I wonder," he said, "which is the best place in this city to hire a suit of dress-clothes for the evening. My social gaieties have given me no cause to find out."

That was all. We turned homeward. I thought with Miss Niblett that he had been talking nonsense. Imagine how surprised I was to hear him revive the subject after a day or two.

"Well, it's all right," he said; "I've managed it. We're invited."

"Invited?" I echoed. "Invited where?"

"Why, to the festivity to-morrow night."

"But," I cried, "you didn't really mean it, did you? You didn't suppose I'd go? The people are strangers to me."

"Oh, that's nothing," he answered. "In Society they often go to strangers' parties. It's rather chic."

"Well, we aren't in Society," I reminded him. "I'm not chic. I can't go junketing with a lot of students I've never seen before."

"You'll never be a bohemian, Rosie," he said; "you don't seem to catch on to the tone of the quarter at all. Now, do come! If you're a good girl you shall be rewarded. You see I have my clothes ready, and it would disappoint me some not to get a chance to show 'em off."

were busy examining the white silk frock that I meant to wear. I was for freshening it with some new tulle, and Miss Niblett kept saying that it would be folly to spend the money. The argument lasted such a long time that I didn't go to school at all that day. Miss Niblett won.

And then behold an afternoon of amazement! As I was boiling the kettle, there came a rap at the door, and whom should I admit but a stylish young woman with a note and a large box! The note consisted of four words—"Frills for the Fairest," and the box contained—a dress. But, my dears, a dress that I can't describe to you! I should need a page to do it justice; such a dress as the fairy godmother might have created when she changed a pumpkin to a chariot.

"What does it mean?" I gasped.

"Is that from him?" stammered Miss Niblett.

"Oh, don't you know it's from him?" I cried hotly. "Now I see why you wouldn't let me buy the tulle! But how can he have paid for it, and how could you encourage him?"

I thought she was going to cry. "Rosie," she whimpered, "he told me he wanted to give you a dress, and asked me to help him, but I never imagined he meant a dress like that; I didn't indeed! How could I? Oh, my child, look at the name on the lid—look where it comes from!"

"Mademoiselle will try it on?" suggested the young woman coolly.

"*What* does she say?" I demanded. She spoke French, of course. It is to be hoped she didn't understand English.

"She says you had better try it on."

"This is madness," I faltered. I looked from the young woman to Miss Niblett; I looked from Miss Niblett back to the frock. "Madness!" I repeated—and tried it on. Oh, what a frock! There were exclamations, and pins, and stitches. And in the middle of it all came another bang at the door.

A porter in uniform stood on the landing. He, too, bore a note and a box; he, too, behaved as if miracles happened every day in the year.

hands that shook. Under the brown paper, tissue paper; under the tissue paper, the glint of velvet, pale blue; I drew out a jewel case; I pressed a spring, and——

"Oh, gracious!" screamed Miss Niblett.

Shimmering on the satin with which the case was lined lay a "rope" of pearls fit for an empress. Not even a string—a "rope"! Three times round the neck it would wind, and hang almost to the waist. We fell on to the sofa, dazed.

"Are they real?" Miss Niblett panted. "Oh, my dear! Give me the case. My dear! They *are* real, I'm sure they are. Oh, my dear! they must be worth thousands upon thousands of pounds. What *does* it all mean?"

And for the rest of the day not a glimpse of my fiancé, not a message from him. Monsieur Martin was out, the concierge told us when we inquired. It had been arranged that he should come for me at ten o'clock, and at half-past eight I began to dress. We lit every candle in the flat that evening. At five minutes to ten I was ready —all but one glove. We sat trembling with curiosity. Then we heard him—singing on the stairs; and he tapped as the hour struck.

"Now!" we both cried. "Perhaps you'll explain?"

If his clothes weren't his own, he had discovered a remarkable establishment; I noted that, despite my dizziness. I fancy I have mentioned how nice-looking he was, but I had never really done him justice before. He was worthy to take his frock out. He stood there admiringly, presenting a bouquet.

"Explain?" he murmured. "Oh, you mean those things I sent you? My dear ladies, patience is one of the most beautiful of virtues—let us cultivate it! Rosie, you're a dream of loveliness. I thought perhaps you'd like a few flowers. Shall we go?"

And we went. I had expected to see a cab at the corner; there was a brougham, with a footman waiting on the kerb.

"Well, no," he said. "I guess we'd be a trifle overpowering, eh? But I never told you it was a student's supper. That student was an invention of your own."

We rolled along luxuriously. To my bewilderment, it seemed that all the capital was astir that night. Crowds, crowds everywhere in the brilliant streets—Paris was a panorama of lights and faces. After a while we began to move more slowly, other vehicles impeded us. I could hear the jangling of horses' bits, the orders of the police.

"We're drawing close," said my lover.

The clatter of hoofs was to right and left of us now. From the window I saw the glare of carriage lamps, caught glimpses of great ladies' gowns and jewelled heads. The brougham swung through gates into a courtyard.

"We are there," said my lover.

I stood on the steps of a palace. On either side of me soldiers were drawn up, startling, spectacular. Music swelled through the doorway. Flunkeys bowed at our approach.

"Where have you brought me?" I whispered. "Whose house is this?"

"He's called the President of the French Republic," was the answer. "Don't be shy."

We passed through the dazzle of the hall. The lights blinded me, and the scent of the roses was very strong. I heard great names spoken, names that made me catch my breath. As those awe-inspiring names were uttered, the scene became more and more unreal. And the guests, the guests who bore the historical names, looked quite ordinary, prick-me-and-I-shall-bleed persons. I think that was the most vivid impression I had in the Elysée—the difference between the persons and their names.

Soon through the throng—among the regal toilettes of the women, and the groups of distinguished, "decorated" men—I grew conscious of the figure of an elderly gentleman, with iron-grey hair and a rather sad smile, moving near to

three I did, I'm unable to tell you; but my lover affirmed afterwards that I was "real charming" —and you may take his word for it, if you are kind enough. I can't pretend that it convinces *me,* for I never felt such a gawk in all my days.

I don't know how long we stayed at the Elysée; I have a vague recollection of eating an ice. But the next thing I remember clearly is our entering the brougham again, and driving away into the fresh sweet air. Then I leant towards him.

I said, "If you've any consideration for me, you'll answer right off and tell me whether I'm awake or asleep. I have pinched myself three times, and I'm still not sure."

"You darling!" he laughed. "I was afraid you'd read it all before I confessed; that was why I stole your newspaper."

"So you did!" I exclaimed. "Why are you in the paper?"

"Well, you see, my Rosie Posy, I bought those pearls for you yesterday," he said, "and I had to get the bank to identify me; I suppose the jewellers chattered last night." He took the paper from his overcoat, and there, if you can believe me, by the light of the little electric lamp over our heads, this is what I saw:

"AN AMERICAN MILLIONAIRE'S SON IN MONTPARNASSE!

MR. MARTIN MCLEOD PLAYS AT POVERTY!!

THE EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIMENT OF A YOUNG CRŒSUS!!!"

After that, what remains for me to tell you? What his father said? Well, his father didn't object to me a bit, and always declares that Martin's marriage was the most sensible action of his life. Though that's nonsense. We spend six months of the year in America, and the other six in Europe. Miss Niblett is still in Paris. I am

the room to say that "Mother has been writing long enough, and must come and play." And there's Martie—Martie with his arm round me, looking down in my face.

WITH INTENT TO DEFRAUD

He wished he were dead. It was not a phrase, a verbal extravagance; he wished it. The only time that he was free from anxiety was when he was asleep. His days were full of hard work, and disappointments, and efforts to make civil words do the duty of money; and it often occurred to George Collier, when he lay his head on the pillow, that if no to-morrow morning came to disturb him, it would be a blessed state of things. He was a writer of humorous books.

When he married Eva, he had been nine-and-twenty, and sanguine, though his humour did

than it needed short-clothes; and before he had recovered from the cost of these, it had grown out of them. The nurse appeared to lie awake all night thinking what she could ask for next, and she was a superior person, with imagination.

To-day there were school fees to be paid, and Eva was no longer admiring, and their address was Pandora Road, Balham. The little house to the right was called "Broadlands," and the one to the left was called "The Towers"; and Collier, in a fit of moroseness, had labelled their own house, "The Hut," and made enemies among the neighbours.

Yes, Eva's sympathy had worn out, like the cheap drawing-room carpet. Balham and Tooting had got on her nerves, perhaps; or George, the failure, was a different man from the popular humorist with whom she had pictured herself driving to brilliant receptions in fashionable gowns. Anyhow, when he reflected that there had been a time when secretly he wrote poetry about her, he turned hot.

She was a pale, slight woman, with grey eyes and fluffy hair, and a red flannel dressing-grown in the morning. After luncheon, when she made her toilette, the grey eyes acquired a soulfulness that came out of a phial, and nobody would have suspected the tart and vulgar reproaches that

could fall from her lips. Had she been what she looked, he thought sometimes, contemplating her wonderingly when an acquaintance was present, his courage wouldn't have deserted him so soon. But, if he had confessed that she weighed on him, the acquaintance would have considered him an unappreciative brute; she looked too wistful, and delicate, and fragile to weigh on anyone.

He was forty years of age, and soberly and deliberately he wished he were dead. Only one thing deterred him from making away with himself in a painless fashion; it was the knowledge that he would leave her and Chick unprovided for.

This was his frame of mind when he came to project a fraud. He saw his way to dying com-

now he was meditating robbery on an extensive scale and barely perceiving his defection.

A man whom he knew very well, and who frequently dropped in of an evening, was Mr. Horace Orkney, a solicitor. George was not sensible of any strong esteem for him, but—perhaps for that reason—Orkney looked the likeliest person for what he wanted; and one afternoon he betook himself to the gentleman's office.

"I have," he said, when greetings had been exchanged, "come on rather delicate business. I needn't tell you that what I am going to say is in confidence."

"Quite so," said Orkney, playing with the ends of his moustache.

"The fact is, things aren't going well; I'm deadly tired of it all, and—— Well, the truth is, I'm anxious to make away with myself."

The lawyer was only thirty-six, and he started.

"To make away with yourself? Oh, nonsense!"

"I mean what I say," insisted Collier; "don't imagine I'm talking through my hat—I haven't come here to waste your time. But my life isn't assured. You see the difficulty. I've got to think of my wife and child, and they'd be practically penniless."

"Assure it," suggested Mr. Orkney, with a

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I said, "If you've any consideration for me, you'll answer right off and tell me whether I'm awake or asleep. I have pinched myself three times, and I'm still not sure."

"You darling!" he laughed. "I was afraid you'd read it all before I confessed; that was why I stole your newspaper."

"So you did!" I exclaimed. "Why are you in the paper?"

"Well, you see, my Rosie Posy, I bought those pearls for you yesterday," he said, "and I had to get the bank to identify me; I suppose the jewellers chattered last night." He took the paper from his overcoat, and there, if you can believe me, by the light of the little electric lamp over our heads, this is what I saw:

"AN AMERICAN MILLIONAIRE'S SON IN MONTPARNASSE!

MR. MARTIN MCLEOD PLAYS AT POVERTY ! !

THE EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIMENT OF A YOUNG CRŒSUS ! ! !"

After that, what remains for me to tell you? What his father said? Well, his father didn't object to me a bit, and always declares that Martin's marriage was the most sensible action of his life. Though that's nonsense. We spend six months of the year in America, and the other six in Europe. Miss Niblett is still in Paris. I am

the room to say that "Mother has been writing long enough, and must come and play." And there's Martie—Martie with his arm round me, looking down in my face.

WITH INTENT TO DEFRAUD

He wished he were dead. It was not a phrase, a verbal extravagance; he wished it. The only time that he was free from anxiety was when he was asleep. His days were full of hard work, and disappointments, and efforts to make civil words do the duty of money; and it often occurred to George Collier, when he lay his head on the pillow, that if no to-morrow morning came to disturb him, it would be a blessed state of things. He was a writer of humorous books.

When he married Eva, he had been nine-and-

t needed short-clothes; and before he had
red from the cost of these, it had grown
them. The nurse appeared to lie awake
ght thinking what she could ask for next,
e was a superior person, with imagination.
day there were school fees to be paid, and
vas no longer admiring, and their address
'andora Road, Balham. The little house
right was called "Broadlands," and the
the left was called "The Towers"; and
r, in a fit of moroseness, had labelled their
ouse, "The Hut," and made enemies among
ighbours.

, Eva's sympathy had worn out, like the
drawing-room carpet. Balham and Toot-
d got on her nerves, perhaps; or George,
lure, was a different man from the popular
ist with whom she had pictured herself
g to brilliant receptions in fashionable
. Anyhow, when he reflected that there
een a time when secretly he wrote poetry
her, he turned hot.

was a pale, slight woman, with grey eyes
uffy hair, and a red flannel dressing-grown
morning. After luncheon, when she made
ilette, the grey eyes acquired a soulfulness
me out of a phial, and nobody would have
ted the tart and vulgar reproaches that

could fall from her lips. Had she been what she looked, he thought sometimes, contemplating her wonderingly when an acquaintance was present, his courage wouldn't have deserted him so soon. But, if he had confessed that she weighed on him, the acquaintance would have considered him an unappreciative brute; she looked too wistful, and delicate, and fragile to weigh on anyone.

He was forty years of age, and soberly and deliberately he wished he were dead. Only one thing deterred him from making away with himself in a painless fashion; it was the knowledge that he would leave her and Chick unprovided for.

This was his frame of mind when he came to project a fraud. He saw his way to dying com-

now he was meditating robbery on an extensive scale and barely perceiving his defection.

A man whom he knew very well, and who frequently dropped in of an evening, was Mr. Horace Orkney, a solicitor. George was not sensible of any strong esteem for him, but—perhaps for that reason—Orkney looked the likeliest person for what he wanted; and one afternoon he betook himself to the gentleman's office.

"I have," he said, when greetings had been exchanged, "come on rather delicate business. I needn't tell you that what I am going to say is in confidence."

"Quite so," said Orkney, playing with the ends of his moustache.

"The fact is, things aren't going well; I'm deadly tired of it all, and—— Well, the truth is, I'm anxious to make away with myself."

The lawyer was only thirty-six, and he started.

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shrug; "I should certainly assure my life, in any case, if I were you. But, my dear Collier, do let me dissuade you from such a—such a—— 'Pon my word!" He pulled out his monogrammed handkerchief, diffusing an agreeable odour of white rose. "You upset me very much."

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humorously. He found himself, on the contrary, perpending it as an experiment in realism.

To the devil with literature! He must die or tell Orkney that he was going to sell him! Which should it be? One course was ghastly, and the other was disgraceful.

He vacillated hourly for a fortnight. And Orkney, meanwhile, seemed ubiquitous. George could not take a walk without meeting him; and Orkney always stopped and spoke, and asked him very coldly how he was.

George used to struggle for composure, but not with success. Then the solicitor would elevate his eyebrows and sigh significantly; and Collier went his way, feeling despicable and ashamed.

blocked. He wasted five minutes on it, fuming. If he didn't smoke, he couldn't think.

Formerly he had annexed his wife's hairpins in such emergencies; and, as a last resource, it occurred to him that, if he searched in the wardrobe where her belongings had been put away, he might find some hairpins.

The key was on his own key-chain, and he went upstairs. The dead woman's trifles had been laid on the shelves. He saw her work-basket, and her dressing-case, and the set of brushes, with "E" on the backs in silver, that he had given her on her last birthday. There was a hat that she had been trimming when she was taken ill, with the needle still sticking in it.

He paused. Momentarily, what he was doing seemed sacrilege. Then he opened the dressing-case and lifted the tray.

There *were* hairpins scattered at the bottom. There was also a bundle of letters, tied with ribbon, and directed in a handwriting that looked familiar. George stared at it. Was he making a mistake, or—— What on earth had the correspondence been about? He turned white, and pulled the ribbon off.

The dates that the letters bore were of the last two years. There was nothing criminal in them; but they were a man's confidential communica-

tions to a woman he loved. They spoke of the writer's "sympathy," of his regret that he could do nothing to "alleviate the dreariness of her life." There were frequent allusions to what "might have been." And they began, "Dearest Mrs. Collier," and were signed, "Yours with devotion, Horace Orkney."

George stumbled out of the bedroom and returned to the parlour; he sank into his chair there, with knitted brows, pondering. After a while he picked up his pen again; but he did not continue the story. He wrote:

"DEAR SIR,—I restore to you herewith certain letters of yours, for which I have no use. I perceive that the late Mrs. Collier's untimely de-

DEAD VIOLETS

"If you ever want me, write to me—I'd come to you from the end of the world!" he had said; and she had answered, "I shall always want you, but I shall never write, and you must never come." She was married.

It was in May that they parted; they parted on the day of her owning that she cared for him. The virtue was hers, not his; yet because he loved her, and realised that she was too good a woman to defy her conscience and be happy, he acquiesced in her decision—refrained from pleading to her, refrained from trying to see her again.

His only indulgence was to send violets to her home in Paris for the ninth of December; the ninth of December was her birthday, and violets, she had once told him, were her favourite flower. He did not scribble any greeting with them, did not even enclose a card; he was sure that she would know who sent them, and it lightened his pain to feel that she would know. Indeed, to recall himself to her thus mutely was a joy, the only joy that he had experienced since the day of the "good-bye"; almost it was as if he were

going to her, that moment in the London florist's when he held the flowers that would reach her hands; she did not seem so lost to him for the moment, the separation did not seem so blank.

The next year, also, he sent violets for the ninth of December. His emotions it is true, were less vivid this time, but he was glad to show her that he was faithful; besides, the prettiness of the reminder pleased him.

And the third year he sent them chiefly because he felt that she would be disappointed if he appeared to forget.

So it had grown to be his custom to send violets to her for her birthday, though what was once an impulse of devotion was now a lie—the weakness of a sentimentalist reluctant to wound

longed for him on every day of the five years, and her tears had blotted some of the girlishness from her face. As he turned and saw her, the woman thought how his mouth had twitched when he said, "I'd come to you from the end of the world." It is among the unacknowledged truths that sentimentality may create as much ferment as enduring love, and he had suffered even more violently than she, though he had not suffered so long.

"What are you doing here in December? You're the last person I should have expected to see," she said.

"I go South to-morrow."

"Lucky man!"

"And you?"

"We're living here now."

"Really? You've left Paris? How long?"

"We've been here since October; we're flat-hunting."

"Oh!"

They stood looking into each other's eyes, neither knowing what to say next. Her heart was thumping terribly, and she felt very happy and very frightened. More than once she had been tempted to write to him that her courage had broken down; all resistance seemed to have left her as she stood looking into his eyes again.

"Flats," she added in a voice of composure, "are so abominably dear in London."

"Where are you staying?"

"In apartments—Bayswater."

"Bayswater must be a change from Neuilly? It was a jolly little place you had in Neuilly!"

"It was rather jolly, wasn't it? My—my husband's people wished us to come over; they thought they might put him into something over here. Of course, in Paris it was cheap, but there were no prospects."

"I understand."

"There's some talk of a secretaryship if a company is floated." It was so natural to be telling him everything now they had met. "It

lonely dwelling-places. . . . Let me take you somewhere and give you some tea."

"I ought to go to some shops; I'm up West to work."

"'Work'? Spending money?"

"Earning it—I'm doing fashion articles."

"You? Do you mean it? Well, come and have some tea first."

It was very early, and there were vacant tables in the alcoves. As he sat opposite her, Orlebar thought what a fraud it was that the things one craved for only came to pass when one had grown resigned to doing without them. How he had besought God for some such chance as this—what a spectacle he had made of himself about her during six unforgettable months! And now he was sipping his tea without emotion, and observing that her clothes compared unfavourably with the other women's in the room! In that moment Orlebar saw the humiliating truth—knew that he had lived his great love down and deceived himself for years. But he didn't want to see—he preferred to deceive himself now. It is often more congenial to be an ass than to acknowledge that you have been one.

"It's a long time since we had tea together, Lucy!"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, what have you got to tell me?"

"I think I told you everything in a breath; at least—— What have you been doing all the time?"

"Trying to kill it."

"You're working in London now, eh?"

"Yes, I've chambers in the Temple. Rather swagger compared with the little shanty in the rue Ravignan. How did you come to take up journalism?"

"Someone suggested it—and my twaddle seemed to do. It's pretty sickening."

"What's the idea—it doesn't pay very well, does it?"

"Not on my paper; I get a guinea a week, but —— Oh, why should I bore you with all that?"

guinea a week. I don't feel so uncomfortable when I meet them, not such a dead weight. We have to go there to dinner on Sundays, and it's rather awful—they tell me what a splendid career he would have had if he hadn't married."

"Damn 'em!" said Orlebar.

"I do—every Sunday afternoon, from the soup to the coffee. Well"—she leant her elbows on the table, and smiled—"have I changed much?"

"No," he said, bravely. "But—but this is brutal hard lines—I didn't dream that you had things like that to put up with! You always seemed so lighthearted in Paris."

"I didn't meet his people in Paris. Besides, things alter in five years; I think— Oh!" she broke off, "it's ridiculous to talk about it to you, I don't know why I'm doing it!"

"Have you anybody else to talk to?"

"No," she admitted, slowly, "that's it. I can't talk to *him* because—well, they're his own people, for one thing; and, besides—well, of course marriage *has* handicapped him, and I suppose he knows it as well as they do."

"Do you mean—? . . . You don't get on now?"

She gave a shrug, and traced lines on the cloth with her spoon. "What do you suppose I mean?"

"I am so sorry for you, dear!"

"Oh, I daresay it's my fault. I suppose I don't do all I ought to make up for what I've cost him; it's difficult to do all you ought when —when—" her voice snapped—"when you sometimes wish to God that you hadn't done so much!"

"Perhaps you'd have done better to come to me, after all," said Orlebar, heavily; he couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I tried to be a good woman—I thought you'd forget me; *I* wanted to forget *you*. Why didn't you let me forget you? Why did you send me those flowers every year?"

"Were you vexed with me for sending them?"

"No."

"Oh, don't!" she said in her throat. "I can't bear it, Phil!"

"What?"

"The life—everything! I'm tired of it all."

"Chuck it!" he muttered; "come away with me to-morrow!"

She didn't speak; she tried to believe that she was struggling. The pause seemed to Orlebar to last a long time while he sat wishing that he hadn't said it. The waitress inquired if they required anything else, and put the check on the table, and took her tip. The place was filling, and a ladies' orchestra began to twang their mandolins.

"Do you want me?" she asked, raising her eyes.

"Do I 'want' you!" What else could he reply?

"Very well, then." She nodded. "I'll go! . . . Let's get out of this—do you mind?—my head aches."

He knew dismally that her consent had come too late, that there would be nothing now to compensate him for the scandal—no months, or weeks, or even minutes of rapture. They got up, and he put the half-crown on the desk, and followed her into the street.

After they had strolled a few yards in silence,

he said, as it seemed obligatory, "You've made me very happy."

She answered, "I'll try to." He wished that she had said anything else—it was painful.

"We'd better have a cab. Where shall we go —will you come to the Temple?"

"I think I'd like to go home; you can drive there with me."

"Can you get away in the morning—or shall I put it off?" he asked in the hansom.

"No, I can get away—he won't be back till the evening."

"Back from where?"

"He went down to his people to-day—they're at Brighton now. What time's the train?"

"Ten o'clock—from Charing Cross; I was go-

o kiss her, and he bent his head. . . . He pitied er acutely as he felt her tears on his face—ated himself for lying to her.

"Cheer up, dearest! Remember how we care or each other," he said.

The effort of affecting joy wore him out as hey drove on. Intensely he wished that they ad found a quicker cab; he wanted a drink bad-, wanted to light a pipe and give way to his loom. Her hand, which he clasped, seemed to im to grow larger and heavier through the long rive; and when at last they parted at her door, e thanked heaven for the right to heave a sigh, or the freedom to look as moody as he felt.

Five years ago. If it had only happened five -four years ago! The pathos of the situation ook him by the throat. What a rotten thing life as! Again his mind reverted to the months hen he had been torn with longing for her—the nging just to watch her, to listen to her, no natter what she said. And now he had kissed er for the first time—as a duty. That aban-onment of despair had played havoc with him, et he wished that it had lasted—it would have een worth while, he thought. God! the ecstasy nat would have been thrilling in him now if he ad suffered like that until this afternoon!

At the Club he ordered a "big whisky and a small soda."

"You're off to Rome soon, aren't you?" said a man presently. "You pampered novelists have all the luck!"

"Yes," said Orlebar. The man was the Editor of a daily paper; it occurred to the novelist that he was about to provide the paper with some surprising copy; also, that the editorial greeting would be less informal when they met again.

What a deuce of a lot of talk there would be! the damage it was going to do him socially! Socially? It would injure him financially, too; he recognised it for the first time as he surveyed the room. There was McKinnell, of the *Mayfair*, ragging a waiter because the toast was cold; Or-

dred pounds was a large sum; he was no millionaire.

And his books? The sale of his next books would drop in this virtuous country when he had outraged the Eleventh Commandment. If she had been "Lady" somebody the public would have called the case "romantic"—it would have been a big advertisement then—but without the glamour of a title they would only call it "disgraceful." For one reader gained by the scandal, half a dozen would be lost. What a calamity, his turning into Bond Street this afternoon!

And how she had jumped at him, he thought with sudden resentment; she hadn't needed much persuasion! He had been an idiot to exalt her into a heroine at the beginning—since it had been fated that he was to ruin himself, he might at any rate have done it while he was in love with her! And he hadn't even the excuse of youth now; he was making a mess of his life when he was old enough to know better, when he did know better—he was ruining himself against his will! He had another whisky-and-soda, and wondered if there was any chance of his hearing that she had changed her mind. Confound it, she didn't know his address! And anyhow there would be no chance; what was she giving up—a husband who didn't want her. If she had had a child, it

would have been a different thing. A pity she hadn't a family! A husband who didn't want her. And he, Philip Orlebar, was going to take her off his hands. Oh, what a mug's game! If he hadn't gone in to have his hat ironed, he wouldn't have met her. And it hadn't really needed ironing either!

He did not remain long in the Club when dinner was over. After all, he had mentioned that his rooms were in the Temple, and the hope that she might try to communicate with him lingered in spite of common-sense. At the gate he looked towards the porter eagerly, but the porter said nothing, and the shock of disappointment told Orlebar how strong the hope had been.

His portmanteaux were half-packed, and he

"You seem a cup low to-night, old chap?" The melancholy stroke of the Temple clock had never sounded so lugubrious as in the hours that followed.

When he woke in the morning, Orlebar remembered that there ought to be a half-bottle of Pommery in the bathroom, and he had it in lieu of tea, with some biscuits. The wine lightened his mood a little; it no longer seemed so hopelessly impossible to conceal his regret; and when he strode into the station, it was with a very fair show of impatience. But his heart leapt as he saw that she wasn't there. He sat down, and glanced alternately at the clock and the doors, praying that she wouldn't come.

She entered just as he was feeling sanguine.

"My darling," he murmured, "here you are!"

"Am I late?"

"I was beginning to be afraid. But there's time enough—I've got the tickets. Where's your luggage?"

"They've taken it through."

"We'd better go, then."

Among the bustle on the platform he could say little more than, "How pale you are!" and "Which are your trunks?" Then they were alone, and the door had been slammed, and the train moved out.

"Darling!" he said again. "Well?"

"Well?"

"It seems too good to be true." His tone was lifeless.

"Does it?"

"Doesn't it to you?"

"I think it's true," she said, with a tired smile.

"How pale you are!" he repeated. "Didn't you sleep?"

"Not much. I've been wondering."

" 'Wondering'? What?"

"Whether I ought to have said 'no.' What would you have done if I'd said 'no,' Phil? Really?"

"What *can* a man do? I suppose I should have had to put up with it."

"Oh"—she hesitated—"we've quarrelled, like everybody else, but—but he's very fond of me. Of course, it'll be an awful blow. I can't forget it—I've been thinking of it ever since."

"It just depends . . . the thing you've got to consider is which way you'll be happier yourself. If—I don't know! I suppose there are women who *can't* go wrong and be happy."

"I'm thinking of my duty," she faltered. "You know I love you, don't you? I want you to know it, to keep remembering it all the time. I love you, I love you, I love you! But—" She waited with her heart in her throat.

"But what?" he asked, moodily. "What were you going to say?"

Her eyes closed with pain.

"Eh?" he said.

"There are his people," she stammered; "they'll feel the disgrace so much. I've been considering everything—I—I didn't know what a wrench it would be."

"You'll get over it."

"I'm not sure? Perhaps I shall always—? Do you think I've . . . made a mistake?" Again she waited breathlessly. If he would only seize her in his arms! If he would only cry, "Let them all go to the devil, and remember *me!*"

"If you feel like that," he said feebly, "of

course I hardly—I hardly know what I can say to you."

"You can't *think* of anything to say?" she pleaded. "There's nothing—nothing I'm overlooking?"

"There's time; one gets over anything in time," he said, incautiously.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned.

She turned to the window, her face as white as a dead woman's. The terror was confirmed that had stolen on her in the cab, that had haunted her throughout the night—confirmed by his tones, his looks, by every answer he had made to her halting falsehoods; he had learnt to do without her, she had given herself unsought! In the agony of shame that overwhelmed her she could

if he's away—there'd be no harm done, would there?"

"You're not angry with me? You won't mind too much?"

"Don't worry about *me*—I want *you* to be happy. To tell you the truth, I think you're right—you are not the woman to kick over the traces, you'd be too cut up about it. Go back and make the best of a bad business—it'll be easier for you to bear than the other, anyhow! We'll see about a train for you as soon as we get in."

At Folkestone Harbour they ascertained that there would be an express to Charing Cross at two o'clock, and he paced the platform with her till it was time to say good-bye. Exhilaration had given him an appetite, but she answered that she wasn't hungry; so, as he had missed his boat, he decided to drive to an hotel on the Leas and have an elaborate luncheon when she had gone. His glances at the playbills on the walls showed him that *San Toy* was at the Pleasure Gardens, and he foresaw himself cheerfully among the audience in the evening. He was feeling on a sudden twenty years younger, and, hard as he strove to acquire a manner of tender gravity, she discerned the improvement in his spirits every time he spoke.

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THE FAVOURITE PLOT

With Variations

THE financier was cracking walnuts when the curate arrived.

"Hallo, boy!" he said. "Why didn't you come to dinner?"

"How do you do, Uncle Murray? Oh, it was impossible to come in time for dinner. I had a Meeting at six o'clock—and it's a long way from Plaistow to Park Lane. Are you quite well?"

"Pretty fit," said Murray Pybus. "Glad to see you again. I was going to drop you a line; I go to New York next month. Help yourself to port."

"Thank you, I don't drink wine," said Cuthbert, a shade reproachfully.

"I forgot," said Pybus. "Cigar? But you don't smoke either! Well, take an armchair; make yourself comfortable. How's Plaistow?"

The curate cleared his throat. "I was anxious to have a talk with you, Uncle Murray, on a very important subject."

"So you wrote me. Well, I know your important subjects; you needn't go into details; of

course it's a bona fide case. How much do you want?"

"Frankly, I am nervous," faltered his nephew.

"Better try the port," counselled Pybus. "No? All right; stick to your colours, even if they're a blue ribbon."

"You have always been so generous—more than generous. Your subscriptions, and—and your proposals as regards myself, though I couldn't accept them, were——"

"Natural enough! You'll have to have the lot one day—I've nobody else to leave it to, and I'm not the man to marry again." He laughed. "It'll be a funny position, eh—an East End curate blooming into a millionaire? You're a queer fish, Cuthbert! I don't say any more about your

career instead. I choose to labour among those who need my poor help the most; and I choose to be in truth their brother—not to hold myself aloof from them, a preceptor in a pleasance."

"Oh, very proper, very high-minded," said the financier hurriedly; "a reputation for conscientiousness, of course, is a valuable asset. Have it your own way, my lad. If I'm not to do anything for you in my lifetime, we'll say no more about it."

The curate flushed.

"As a matter of fact," he stammered, "my reason for wishing to see you was to beg you to do something for me. My principles are quite unchanged; I still mean to work among the poor, I'm still resolved to abstain from living among them luxuriously, but—well, circumstances have arisen which—er— Perhaps I had better tell you everything, as it happened."

"Best way," said Pybus, repressing a groan.

"I was rather seriously unwell some weeks ago, and my Vicar induced me to take a brief holiday. He is always most considerate."

"Any family at the vicarage?"

"Family? There are his three daughters."

"Ah," murmured the millionaire. "Yes, he would consider you attentively. Go on."

"Some pleasant seaside place was desirable.

and I went to Hastings. The Castle is most fascinating."

"Well?"

"Well, my lodgings were not cheerful, and the weather was unpropitious, so altogether——"

"You got the hump?"

"I was—er—rather—yes. One evening, as it was too wet to take a walk, I attended a performance of *A Crown of Thorns*. Of course, I had heard about it—I knew that it had been approved by organs of the Press that don't mention such things as a rule—but I confess that it amazed me. I found its religious teaching quite as admirable as the historical instruction it afforded—the insight into the life of ancient Rome. It was practically my first visit to a theatre, and

"You haven't come to ask me to endow a theatre, I hope?" put in the millionaire genially.

"Oh, indeed, not at all, sir—the idea had not presented itself to me. Hear me out! The part of the heroine was taken by a lady who possessed such spiritual fervour that, at first, I regretted her choice of a career. How true it is that prejudice dies hard! I grieved—it was narrow of me! —that she was not devoting herself to the propagation of faith among the heathen of our own time, instead of to the mimic—er—I mean that it seemed to me she was wasting her precious gifts, that she ought to have been a missionary."

"I quite follow you," said Pybus drily.

"I did not recognize the truth at once; but then it came to me—I understood! As I looked round at the eyes wet with tears, I saw that the stage may make for good as powerfully as the pulpit; I saw that this beautiful girl, uttering the grace that was in her to hundreds nightly—I don't know if I mentioned that she has been favoured with remarkable beauty—was stirring the minds of mere pleasure-seekers to the contemplation of higher things; I saw that she was working in the same Cause as myself."

"Great Scott, boy, you've fallen in love with an actress!" exclaimed Pybus. "So that's it?"

"Later, I certainly learnt to love her," replied

the curate with dignity, "though I don't perceive by what process you have arrived at the fact. I had the happiness to meet her the next afternoon —in the waiting-room at a dentist's—and the passing of a magazine led to conversation."

"Did you tell her that you thought she ought to have been a missionary?"

"I believe I did say something of my earlier regret; and she agreed with me that she was doing equally exalted work on the stage. Perhaps my enlightenment may be partly due to that conversation; her thoughts on the subject were very beautiful. One answer that she made impressed me deeply: 'Religion and Art,' she said, 'are in reality the same thing.' . . . Without the context it is not so forcible, but when she said it, it was a

was going to London—to various theatres in the suburbs—so I was able to see her when I returned; and—and she has consented to be my wife."

"You told her you were my nephew, eh—my heir?"

"I saw no reason for reticence. I trust you have not formed a poor opinion of a lady whom you have never seen?"

"Not at all; I should have a poor opinion of her if she'd refused you under the circumstances. But you're making yourself ridiculous. You've lost your head over an actress; you've taken a queer, clerical way about it, but you've lost your head over an actress. It won't do, Cuthbert, the thing's absurd."

Cuthbert had turned very pale.

"I'm sorry to find you so unjust," he groaned. "I had hoped, in view of the many offers you have so kindly made me, that you'd be willing to —to further my happiness. Marriage upon my stipend is impossible, as you know. I trusted to your affection to—to— Why, you've pressed me to take an allowance over and over again!"

"Look here, boy," exclaimed Pybus, "I'm going to talk straight to you! You're the nearest relative I've got, and though you were never the sort I was keen on leaving a million to, I knew

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daresay the girl's right enough—for the right man; but she's a long way from right for you. You don't really suppose she can care about you. You're a good lad, but the last fellow in the world to please an actress. If you hadn't told her you were my nephew, she'd have laughed in your face when you proposed to her."

"I am prepared," said the curate resignedly, "to suffer humiliation if need be."

"Oh, well, I don't want to hurt your feelings. But—er—well, she *would! I* know what actresses are like."

"But you don't know *her*. If you would talk to her once, she would convert you; you would own you were wrong. My life's happiness is at stake. Before you decide, let me bring her to see you. Surely it is no more than fair?"

Pybus picked up the evening papers. "It's no good going on with it; that's all I've got to say."

He opened the *Pall Mall*.

"Good-night, sir," quavered the curate, extending a hopeless hand.

"Good-night, boy," said the financier cordially. "Whenever you want anything in reason let me know."

Cuthbert took a bus to Victoria, and arrived at the Shakespeare, Clapham, in ample time. It was still embarrassing to him to loiter at a stage-

door; but a man is justified in meeting his fiancée anywhere. He endeavoured to assert this by his bearing when loafers stared at him. Nobody was ever quite so high-minded as Cuthbert tried to look when he waited at stage-doors.

"My own, I have failed," he told her, as they walked to Clapham Junction.

The hand on his arm trembled. "What did he say?"

"He was obdurate; he refused point blank. Why should I pain you by repeating the insults I had to bear?"

"Just because I am an actress!" exclaimed the girl pathetically. "Oh, what we have to put up with, we artists; how uncharitable they are to us! . . . Then it's all over between you and I?"

I'm sure—your intelligence and beauty would win him over, though he wouldn't appreciate your soul; but he declined to see you."

"It's a pity I can't be introduced to him as somebody else—go there as a hospital nurse or something. Then when I'd got round him, and he was very grateful to me, I could say, 'my name is Angela Noble—I love your nephew!' "

"It is a sweet idea. But his health is robust, and, besides, he goes abroad very soon."

"That's what *I* shall have to do," she said moodily.

"You?"

"If we don't marry, I must take the engagement for New York; you know I have the offer open—I shall have to go."

"New York?" cried Cuthbert. "I hoped you had dismissed the notion." He was meditative. "Angela, I have a daring thought! I will *not* fail."

Pybus was considerably surprised a day or two later at receiving a pleasant letter from the young man wishing him an agreeable voyage and inquiring by what boat he was to cross; he was considerably irritated at receiving a second letter reminding him of his permission to ask reasonable favours. A lady of the curate's acquaintance was "departing for America, unprotected, by

her angling for tips.

Pybus swore, and di

And the boat sailed.

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jumping overboard. You may bet"—"bet" had been imperfectly erased—"feel sure I shall do as much in the time as I can. Dear one——" Cuthbert kissed the ship's stationery with enthusiasm.

She was a bright girl—she hasn't been seen to advantage with the curate—and she was working for by far the most profitable engagement of her career; before the first sweepstake on the run she began to play her part in quite another manner than the one she had mentally rehearsed. The spiritual note that Cuthbert had expected of her—to go on being the heroine of *A Crown of Thorns* after the curtain was down—wouldn't catch on here at all, she decided; there was no hit to be made on those lines. Admiration, a wide-eyed homage of the financier's cleverness? Probably all the women he met looked at him like that—it had been played out long ago. The smartest thing would be to treat the middle-aged magnate as if he were an amusing young man!

She did it. It was much easier than being soulful, much less fatiguing. She laughed, she chaffed, she even flirted with him a little. Pybus, who had been prepared to find her a consummate nuisance, hadn't been on such good terms with himself for years.

The day before they sighted Sandy Hook he said, "I hope I shall see something of you after

we land? Are you staying in New York long?"

"I—I hardly know," she answered. "It depends." It depended on the way he took it when she sprung the truth on him directly; she felt less self-possessed than usual.

"Anyhow, there's my address. If there's anything I can do I shall be glad."

"That's very kind of you. I wonder how much you mean it?" She flashed a glance. "I might ask for something big."

"Ah, I didn't pledge myself to do anything you asked; I said I'd be glad to do anything I could."

"Cautious person!" They were pacing the deck, and they walked in silence for a minute. She was wondering if it would be discreet to de-

"Let me help you," suggested Pybus. "Pull me up if I'm wrong. You are an actress; my nephew Cuthbert thinks he is in love with you; and you came aboard in the hope of persuading me to agree to your marriage. Whether you were going to New York, anyhow, I don't know; I trust you were, for I should be sorry to have put you to so much inconvenience. Now the beginning is over—proceed!"

Miss Noble had uttered a faint exclamation of astonishment; she stared blankly at the sea.

"You seem surprised," he said. "That isn't flattering to my intelligence. Cuthbert's circle of pretty women is strictly limited, I take it—any doubt that I had of your identity when I got his letter was removed the moment I saw you."

"Oh, then you do think I'm pretty?" faltered Miss Noble.

"You are not a beauty, but your face is pleasing. I say you threw yourself in my way with the intention of convincing me that you were a much nicer girl than I supposed you to be. Am I correct?"

"Quite correct," said Miss Noble in a low voice. "It was an innocent plot."

"It is the favourite one—it has been in the English magazines every month since I was a child. Well, I am convinced. Don't misunder-

stand me. I find you brainier, wittier, and nicer in every respect; in fact, you are even more calculated than I assumed to spoil his life."

"Mr. Pybus!"

"Keep your temper—it's a reflection on him, not on you. I'll explain. Cuthbert is my heir *faute de mieux*—which may be translated as 'Because I haven't a son, much as I should like one'—and though I've never pretended he was the apple of my eye, I should regret to see him come to grief. If you were the flabby, phonographic sort of young woman to echo his sentiments and make him happy, I'd say, 'Take him with my sympathy—he's yours!' You're a hundred per cent. too charming for the marriage to be a success. You have come down to his stand-

ther reason that I don't wish *you* to be unhappy, either. You find him a pill, naturally, and you'd have been bored to death."

"You are despising me," she exclaimed; "you think I'm a mercenary creature without a heart, who——"

"Don't talk to me as if I were Cuthbert. I don't despise you in the least. You are in a very precarious and overcrowded calling, and you'd have married him for position—as hundreds and thousands of fashionable and wealthy girls would be willing to marry him, if I smiled approval—but I know you'd have found him dear at the price. And I have a third reason, though I can assert quite truthfully that the first alone would prevent my consenting. I'd like to marry you myself."

"You?" she gasped.

"Why not? Of course you're not in love with me, but you like me much better than you like him, you can't dispute it. Professionally you are nineteen, I suppose; that's to say you are really about twenty-eight; so I'm two-and-twenty years older than you are. It's a lump, but I'm lively for my age and if you go on flirting with me you'll make me feel considerably younger. It'll be rough on Cuthbert I own—my marrying you will cost him about a million. Still, he won't have

you in any case; and a hundred and fifty a year would be a great deal more appropriate. Besides, it's entirely his own fault; he should have taken 'no' for an answer when he came to see me, and then I should never have met you. Think it over. If you regard me as a fairly young man, you needn't hesitate; and if you don't, remember that there's no fool like an old one—that you'll have a very good time."

"You couldn't respect me?" murmured Miss Noble. "You'd feel that I was only marrying the money—that the man didn't matter?"

"I am not without some natural vanity, I assure you. Come, which do you feel more at home with, him or me?"

"You," admitted Miss Noble softly.

TIME, THE HUMORIST

HERBERT HARDING was one of the most distinguished dramatic critics in London, one of the most scholarly and acute. Yet no man is a prophet to his family, and at home "H.H." was considered to be "wasting his life at the game."

Of course, the old people took the paper in which his first-night notices appeared, and they wrestled with his essays in volume form—essays, by the way, which will always be ranked among the most valuable contributions to the psychology of the theatre; but the references to Diderot, and Stendhal, and other persons of whom they had never heard before baffled them mightily, and if the book had been written by anybody but Herbert, they would never have read a dozen pages of it. As Harding senior, a sensible and hearty Englishman, used to say to his wife, "Thank God, he wasn't literary himself, and to discuss whether the heroine of a play would have behaved like this, or have behaved like that, when one knew that she wasn't a real woman at all, seemed to him the sort of tomfoolishness for young girls in a drawing-room, and not the kind

of thing he would have expected a son of his to do for a living, damn it!"

There were persons who professed to see in the fact that Harding had always been unappreciated by his relatives, the explanation of his marriage. But there were many cultured women who admired him; Gertrude Millington's homage was not singular. She was, certainly, amiable, and she "wrote"; yet when one remembers the triviality of her stories, one would have supposed her authorship would deter, rather than attract, a man like Harding. Besides, he had privately resented the necessity for making her acquaintance.

She was a friend of one of his sisters—he had met her when he went down to his people for a

"I never expected to get the chance to meet Mr. Harding," she said reverentially.

Harding thawed. Since she recognised him as a master, he was prepared to tolerate her. In five minutes he had gathered that to be talking to him was one of the events of her life.

Naturally they talked of the theatre, and though her attitude towards the drama was untrained, Harding perceived an eagerness to be enlightened, a quickness of intelligence that saved him from being bored. That, at any rate, was how he put it to himself, though whether her eagerness and intelligence would have interested him if she had not been passably good-looking is a doubtful point.

The fortnight proved uncommonly pleasant to him, and as he did not have an opportunity for looking at any of her work until they were back in town and he was well in love with her, the crudity of her fiction did not infuriate him so violently as it would have done otherwise. On the contrary, he persuaded himself that, underlying the immaturities of style and characterisation, there was the glint of genuine talent.

His income, derived solely from his pen, was slender; but everything is relative, and Miss Millington lived in a boarding-house at West Kensington. Compared with her own, his means

were substantial. To cut the courtship short, he married her. Miss Millington, the unknown, became the wife of Harding, the august. Women who had made a reputation called on them, and "wondered what he could have seen in her, they were sure!" His best friends confessed themselves "a bit surprised at his choice"; and Harding, with all the ardour of his intellect and his affection, proceeded to cultivate his wife's mind.

Never was a disciple more devoted. She put her story-writing aside—he had advised her to do that until she was more widely read—and plodded conscientiously through the list of classics that he drew up for her improvement. As often as he obtained two seats, she went to the theatre with him, and listened absorbed to his catalogue of the

the deadly dulness of her education without a murmur.

Her confinement was a holiday. Harding, however, was far too fond of his wife to neglect her because he had a son, and after she was up again, he devoted as much earnest attention to her as before. By this time she could give forth dozens of his opinions with all the fidelity of a phonograph, and he contemplated her progress with the tenderest pride.

The baby, and a nurse, and the necessary change in the domestic arrangements meant increased expenses, and now she sometimes reflected that the modest cheques obtainable by her pen would be an aid.

Once she said to him:

"Herbert, when do you think I might go back to my work? Don't you think I might write something again now?"

"What do you want to write?" he asked, with an indulgent smile.

"I suppose what I ought to do is another book; I should like to write a play, though."

"A play?" He stared. "My child, you aren't a dramatist."

"Well, I never *shall* be one if I don't make a beginning. I should think I ought to be able to manage a piece, after all I've read."

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writing again, perhap
Not

an author already. She winced. But his remonstrance, affectionate as it was, took the pluck out of her. She let the subject down, and put her aspirations on the shelf. She divided her time between the baby and the books henceforth, though the baby came gradually to receive the larger share.

They had three children, and an odious little house in Balham when she did pencil "Act I.—A Drawing-Room" at last. She did not mean to let Harding guess her project till the comedy was finished; she knew that he would have discouraged her, that he would have repeated that she had no qualifications for dramatic work, or, at best, that it was years too soon for her to attempt it. But she told herself that when the piece was done, when she read it to him, and saw his pleasure, that would make amends for everything. She pictured his surprise as she said carelessly, "Oh, by the way, if you can spare an hour this evening, there's something I want you to hear!" The anxiety of his gaze as she produced the manuscript and announced "A Comedy in Three Acts," she could imagine that too! He would sit down nervously, twisting his moustache, and, of course, her voice would wobble frightfully. Then presently his face would change—she foresaw his smile, the sudden lift of his head at a good line,

the growing wonder of his expression. In her hopes she heard him exclaim that her work had wit, brilliance, and, above all, reality—that she had amazed and made him proud of her. It was a young and rather foolish woman's dream, but it sprang from her love for him quite as much as from her personal ambitions.

And she wrote. She drove her pen in secret for months; she was not a slow writer—far from it—but there were few occasions on which she could feel confident of being undisturbed. Her best hours were when there was a "first night" somewhere, for then there was no danger of Harding popping into the room before she could thrust the manuscript out of sight. While the critic sat in judgment at the theatre, his wife sat

of the play that he had been to see, and she would agree sapiently with all his observations.

The disciple had, in fact, become a companion by now, and, despite the state of the exchequer, Harding knew no regret for having married her. When he recalled the uncultured girl of the honeymoon, and constrasted her with the woman who understood most of his English references and quotations, he was delighted with the success he had effected. It was with a shock, a shudder, one day, that he picked off the mantelpiece a bill for typewriting *"The Audacity of Dinah,* in three acts." Forebodings hinted that his success wasn't quite so triumphant as he had thought.

"What's this?"

"Oh!" How stupid she had been to leave it there! Now she had to tell him the great news differently from the way she had planned. "It's mine."

"I see it is," said Harding. " 'The Audacity of Dinah'?"

Her nod was embarrassed. "Yes."

"I didn't know you were writing."

"No, I didn't want you to know till I could read it to you; I meant to tell you after dinner. I—I'm very anxious to hear if you think it will do." She flushed, and smiled shyly. "I'm rather pleased with it; I've been at it a long time; I

think—I think I've done something you'll find a good word for."

"Baby!" said Harding, pinching her cheek; "I've no doubt I shall find a good word for it, but I'm afraid I shall have to say things you won't like, too. I shall be quite candid with you, I warn you."

"Oh, that's just what I want," she declared, laughing happily; "I want you to forget who I am altogether—you must be just Herbert Harding listening to a new author. No compliments, no—what's the word?—euphemisms. It's to be real criticism, please."

"All right," he said. "Well, when am I to hear it—at once?"

"I think after dinner will be best—I've always

first few minutes, his hands were not quite steady as he filled his pipe.

She drew her own chair to the table, and after an instant's hesitation, began to read.

Harding listened intently, his gaze fixed on the fire. And before she had read for half an hour astonishment laid hold of him. Awhile ago, catching something of her excitement, he had fancied that the play might reveal a talent that he had underrated, a promise of good things to come; originally, he had fancied that it would repel him; but at no time had he fancied that it would be quite so dejecting as it was. He was astounded that any woman who had studied so much good work could be capable of writing so badly. The man suffered—silently and acutely suffered—as, gaining courage, she declaimed her travesty of human nature with gusto. He pitied her, he could have wept for her, he would rather have been compelled to sit out a pantomime every night for a year than to tell her the truth.

But she closed the covers of Act I., and said, with her soul in her eyes, "Well?"

He shifted the pipe between his teeth, and stifled a groan. "Let me hear it right through," he answered, postponing the evil moment.

"Act II.," she continued in a clear voice.

It was eleven o'clock when the ordeal ended.

"Ah!"

"But it isn't work

"Oh!"

He hastened to ac
pretty lines."

"That's nice!" Sh

"You put them in t
though. In the last a
thrope talk like the C

"Kindness has chang
you like the girl?"

"She's not consisten
seventeen one minute,
She has had 'no social e
off the woman of the
That's the fault all thro
for something smart, yo
it's appropriate to the
mother makes an epigra
she thinks I

"In other words, you don't think anything of it?"

He shifted the pipe again. "Well——"

"Oh, be frank, Herbert!" she cried. She was very white. "There musn't be any humbug between you and me!"

"It's no good, Gertie," he confessed wretchedly.

She gathered it up, and put it in a drawer, and shut the drawer very quietly. Her mouth had hardened. He was a distinguished critic, and her husband; but she was an author, and her pride was in arms. For the first time she doubted his wisdom. For the first time she opposed her will to his. It was "no good," he had said—she could not accept the pronouncement, she would prove to him that he was wrong!

"We won't talk any more about it," she said presently, when he offered some feeble comfort. "I've made a mistake, that's all." But she meant that her mistake was having invited his opinion, not having written the comedy.

She determined to submit it to the Piccadilly Theatre without delay. Of course, she would not put her own name to it now—as he thought it so worthless he would probably object to its being known as his wife's even if it were produced. She would choose a pseudonym. And if her work

were taken, if it made a success, she would mention to him, very gently, but firmly, that he was too ready to find fault, that his prejudices warped his judgment—in fact, that he wasn't quite so excellent a critic as he believed himself to be.

At this point it may be stated that his criticism of *The Audacity of Dinah* was absolutely sound. The piece was every bit as bad as he thought it.

She posted the manuscript the following afternoon, and many weeks later it was returned to her with "regret." The Piccadilly, she said doggedly, was not the only theatre in London—she made up the parcel once more and sent it to the Diadem. The Diadem also "regretted," and took longer to communicate the fact. To several West End theatres the comedy was offered unavail-

replied, "I'm sure you are, dear," with a touch of patronage.

He did not attend the production himself; as he explained to her, he would have been bound to express his convictions sincerely. The Editor put on another man to "do" *The Audacity of Dinah,* and, on the whole, the other man's notice was favourable. With a few exceptions, all the Press was tolerant. Better still, the piece captured the Public. The booking next day was brisk, and increased steadily through the week. On the second Saturday night they played to "the capacity of the house." The comedy came to be known as one of the few genuine successes of the year, and of course it had leaked out that the author was Mrs. Herbert Harding. The illustrated journals devoted a page to her photograph, favouring their readers with details of her "literary methods," and with her views on the world in general. A manufacturer's advertisements informed the kingdom that *The Audacity of Dinah* had been written with a "Dashaway Fountain Pen (price 10s. 6d., of all stationers)." She lectured to the Front Row Club on "How to Write a Play." Posters proclaimed the "300th Performance." And various theatrical managers expressed a deferential hope that they, too, might

successful plays, o
ings have removed
high-sounding Ter
the children often c
a noise on the stai
Gertrude is a pers
authority in the ho
hearsal in a thousar
he goes alone, the c
feels more cheerful.
ménage that she pr
that he were alone f

THE BACK OF BOHEMIA

I

As two ladies came out of the florist's in the rue Royale and moved towards their carriage, the younger of the pair gave a start of surprise, and exclaimed, "Ernest!"

"Who?" said Lady Liddington, vaguely.

Her niece was already shaking hands with him —a young man with a voluminous necktie and a soft felt hat, who looked poor and clever and bohemian.

"Ernest," she cried, "how glad I am to see you!"

"Kate! Who'd have thought of meeting you here!" He gazed at her with astonishment and admiration. "I should hardly have recognised you."

"I've grown up. Let me . . . my aunt, Lady Liddington. You've often heard of Ernest, Aunt Madge. I was his first critic. And your mother and father?"

"Quite well, thanks."

"They're with you?"

Paris nearly five years
"And working?"
"And working. I'm a
"I can see you're a pa
"Why 'of sorts'?"
"Art is a very arduou
murmured Lady Liddin
she was praying that no
happen to pass. Really
"sight"! "Do you exhibi
"Not yet. I only sell.'
"Oh? I always unders
"I'm at the lowest of th
Liddington. At present
on I shall manage to ex
sell. Finally I hope to ex
the way is long."
"I see," she replied, pr
"A real

"Yes, I was good at dreams; dreams don't need anatomy. How well I remember it all!"

"You must come and see us," she said, "and soon! I've a hundred questions to ask you. What are we doing to-morrow, Aunt Madge?"

"Er—to-morrow? There's the Elysée in the evening, you know; and the next night, I'm afraid— But if to-morrow afternoon——"

"I shall be delighted," he said.

The victoria drove away; and the two occupants mused for a moment.

The elder was the first to speak.

"Your introduction was delicious. Who *is* the gentleman?"

"You don't mean to say you don't know him? —Ernest!"

"Yes, I heard you call him 'Ernest.' I shouldn't do it again if I were you. Hasn't he a surname by any chance?"

"Not call him—? Oh, how absurd! He's Ernest Mallock. Why, we were almost like brother and sister till his people had to leave Moyamehane and go abroad. My mother must have spoken of them to you a thousand times."

"Oh," said Lady Liddington, "he's Cyril Mallock, is he? But you're not in the wilds of County Roscommon now, remember! You've grown up, and——"

"And the Mallocks have lost all their money!" concluded Miss Ormerod, with warmth. "Don't leave that out, because it's really what you want to say. Yes, they're ruined—and what of it? If you think it's any reason why I should cut a boy in the streets who——"

"My dear," said the other, plaintively, "I did not suggest that you should cut *anybody* in the streets. I only hinted— It's very unkind of you to talk like that."

The girl turned apologetically.

"Poor Aunt Madge! Yes, I was bolting, wasn't I? I'm sorry. But if you knew how happy it made me to see him—it was like a bit of my childhood crossing the road. It was Ernest who taught me to sit a horse, and how to throw a

for ever, if that's the only prospect he can boast."

"I don't suppose he even thinks of it. His clothes seem to jar you like an Anarchist banner. He used to be rather a dandy, I can tell you, till the crash came. And Lord Fernahoe might have paid off the mortgage without feeling it—hateful man! But he quarrelled with the Mallocks years ago."

"Very strange, isn't it? Perhaps his brother did something disgraceful."

"Why on earth should it be Mr. Mallock's fault?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know, my dear. Only one of them must have been to blame, it's very certain; and it's always pleasanter to blame the people you don't meet; don't you think so? How sweet those roses smell, but what a price! I'm sorry we bought them."

Men said of Madge Liddington that she was "a good sort." Her worldliness was not disagreeable, not too real. She herself said that she knew what she ought to do, but somehow never did it. Her theories were more cynical than her heart. And on the morrow, when Mallock came, she was gracious, and even cordial.

He had made some concessions to the fashionable address. His clothes, if shabby, were less unconventional to-day; and obviously he had no

of sentiment.

"Tell me all," s
frankly! Does it c
You're a painter, y
hemia; is it all as l
going to be? Does
about the time when
discuss his 'methods'
What are you paint
studio?"

"Which am I to an

"Talk! Tell me w

"It's all right. Yes
our methods, I'm afr
many books—when w
them; and my Paris is
it's a different world."

"It must be heavenl
should have loved to g
do you know

the people who come here are the cropped and dull ones."

"Kate!"

"Well, they are, Aunt Madge. . . . Do you know Sardou, or Alphonse Daudet, or Sarah Bernhardt?"

He shook his head.

"No. I know one or two English correspondents. I did a piece of newspaper work myself not long ago."

"Really?"

"In collaboration. Gladstone was expected in Paris, and my friend thought he'd like to send an Interview with him to his paper. We wrote it together at one of the tables outside a café on the Boul' Mich' while Gladstone was still travelling towards the gare du Nord. We credited him with some highly interesting views. I don't know if they were ever published."

"Oh!"

"And do you prefer living here to being n London?" inquired Lady Liddington; "or ouldn't you work so well at home?"

"I've scarcely thought about it," he said, with a shrug; "this *is* my home now. Oh, I should say London'd be ghastly—unless one were making a big income. For the smaller fry——"

"Dull?"

"I shouldn't like it. I've heard about it. A fellow that I know here works for London—black and white work, you know. Oh, rather funny! Did you ever see a magazine called *The Lantern?* It's very earnest—and only sixpence. Last month poor Tassie had to illustrate the line, 'He strolled meditatively through the summer night.' He made the man lighting a cigar. The other day he got his sketch back; the Editor wrote reprovingly that 'in *The Lantern* they didn't smoke.' "

He stayed an hour; and, in the circumstances, could one do less, when he rose, than fix an evening for his dining there? After he had dined there, what was more natural than that he should call?

ger. He had begun to look forward to the meetings, and so had the girl. He interested her; she was interesting to him. He had been right in saying that they belonged to different worlds; and that their lives were the antithesis of each other had, itself, a fascination—the deeper for the fact that they had once been so much alike. He knew his Bullier, his Montmartre, the minor studios, and the third-rate cafés; he wasn't unfamiliar with the interior of the nearest mont-de-piété. But of the Paris unfolded to Lady Liddington's niece he knew very little. It was a novel experience to him to see a dinner-table poetised by flowers and a Salviati service. It was even a strange thing to Mallock to be sitting in a room with two ladies and listening to ladies' conversation.

If, as the weeks passed, he told himself that he was being a fool, it must be conceded that the temptation to folly was a strong one; but it must also be acknowledged that he told the truth. He already thought much too often of Miss Ormerod for a man who could not hope to marry her, and yet he continued to see her because he was too weak to stay away.

Then he knew that he loved her. He ceased at last to excuse himself by saying that he found her "companionable," that there was "nothing in

it"; he knew that he loved her, that the world was peopled by men, women, and Kate Ormerod; that she stood on a plane by herself—different from everyone else.

Paris now—the Paris that was open to him—stank in his nostrils. When he could not be with her during the day, he worked doggedly, and badly, finding occupation a relief to his impatience; but in the evening, to paint was impossible—and it was in the evening that he ate his heart out.

He had not the faintest right ever to own his feelings to her, and he was aware of it. If he acted properly, he would assert that he had to go to Caudebec or somewhere and say good-bye; but he could not string himself to the necessary pitch.

drawing-room, she was in it alone, reading a Tauchnitz novel. Kate was practising, he was told; indeed, he could hear the piano.

"I was going to write to you," said Lady Liddington; "we're returning to London."

He stared at her blankly.

"It's an awful bore; we meant to stay quite two months longer. But things pull me back."

"You go soon?"

"To-morrow. And I'm such a shocking sailor."

Miss Ormerod had begun Chopin's Second Nocturne. Mallock listened to a line of it intensely, without realising he listened. He felt that he had turned pale, and that it was essential to say something; but his mind refused to yield a commonplace. Lady Liddington, who had avoided plain-speaking with her niece by the same pretext, was no longer confident that the necessity for plain-speaking had been escaped.

"I'm sorry," he said, at last. He played with the book she had put down. . . . "Is it good?" he asked desperately.

"It's a romance. No, stereotyped. A romance always ends with a marriage."

"Isn't that realistic? Marriage is generally the end of romance."

"You're practical, Mr. Mallock."

"Quite the reverse, I'm afraid," he stammered,

This is au revoir,
I see Miss Ormerod?"
"I don't think she
I'll let her know."
"Please don't troub
I pass the room. I hc
crossing."
He wasn't forbidden
Kate lifted her head
"You!"
"So you're going aw
"We go to-morrow."
"Your aunt just told
more."
"Not before we leave,
"I mayn't see you ag
won't come back to Pari
"Oh, yes—some time!"
"I shall miss you horril
I shall do with

"Good-bye!" said Mallock, jerkily. He put out his hand, and she rose. His misery glowed in his eyes. In hers—but he dared not read them. He caught her hand to his lips and kissed it, and went out. Lady Liddington heard the door close. . . . The nocturne was not resumed.

II

WELL, it was all over! He had never been so wretched in his life. He walked away aimlessly; it was nothing to him where he went. Outside the Grand Hotel he collided with a gentleman hurrying from the courtyard. Both looked round with resentment. The gentleman was his father.

The next instant Mallock realised that his father was in deep mourning. "Good God! My mother—?" he faltered.

"Your mother was never better," exclaimed the other gaily, clapping him on the shoulder; "she sends her love, and a thousand messages! I was on my way to you. Let me look at you. Well, well, well! it is good to see you again, Ernest. You know the news, don't you?"

"News? What news?"

"'What news'? You haven't heard? Prepare yourself!" He chuckled. "Prepare yourself, my boy!"

"Something good?"

"It is very sad," returned his father, suddenly assuming an expression of solemnity, "very terrible. But as we have seen nothing of them for so long— My brother and his son are dead—drowned. A yacht accident. Poor Maurice! He had his faults, but—poor Maurice! . . . Let's go inside—you haven't lunched, have you? I'll tell you all about it."

The bohemian listened, half stupefied.

"You're Lord Fernahoe?" he said. "You're Lord Fernahoe now?"

"And you're the Honourable Ernest Mallock. Better than your profession, eh? Not but what you might have a studio still, if you fancied it. It would be rather chic. And all the pretty

the life of a poor man." He spoke as if he had been condemned to be a dock-labourer. "How do you think I'm looking?"

"You're looking as well as ever—and as young."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Ha! ha! What'll you drink? We had better have champagne—my doctor advises a glass of champagne. . . . You must order some clothes. You are—you are damned shabby. Go to a tailor to-day; don't forget. What are you doing with yourself this evening?"

"Nothing," said Mallock. "That's to say——"

"Nothing that won't keep. You'll meet me, and we'll have a little dinner together at—Bignon's is gone, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Where do you go, as a rule?"

"I?" He smiled grimly. "I'm afraid my haunts would hardly suit you."

"No, I suppose not. Well, all that's finished. You've grown very handsome, Ernie; you remind me of myself when I was your age. I may say that now—an old man? . . . But you look dazed. It was a horrible affair; poor Maurice! poor Maurice! But don't look so dazed."

"You've staggered me," said Mallock, gulping

his wine. "I—I— If you don't mind, I'll leave you now. Where shall we meet?"

"Call for me here," said Fernahoe, airly; "say six o'clock. There are some things I've got to attend to: I have to be shaved, and— By the way, to-morrow I can let you have a substantial sum; in the meanwhile, here's something to go on with—I suppose it'll be useful? Six o'clock, then, sharp. And don't forget the tailor. Ta! ta!"

"Six o'clock. Thanks. I won't be late."

Lorn Fernahoe signed to a cabman. His son stood stupidly on the kerb after the cab had rattled away. His eyes were wide, and his mouth was set. After a minute he crossed the road, and turned down the avenue de l'Opéra, still with the

The room was bedroom and parlour, too. The bed was in disorder; on the table the remainder of a stew that had been hot two hours ago was stiffening in the gravy. A baby of twelve-months, unkempt, uncared for, lay fretting on a pillow on the floor; and a woman in a flannel dressing-gown sat reading an English novelette. She turned her untidy head, shedding a hair-pin as she moved.

"Oh, here you are!" said Ernest Mallock's wife.

He threw himself on the bed. "I'm here!"

"Have you brought back any money?"

"Take all you want."

"My word!" she exclaimed, with delight. "You're in luck!"

"Yes," he groaned, "I'm devilish lucky!"

She stooped for the fallen hair-pin, and picked her teeth with it.

"Where does it come from? You've never sold that old 'Solitude,' surely?"

"Oh, for God's sake be quiet!" he said, "I'm tired."

"Where have you been? Everything's got cold. Shall I hot it up for you?"

"No, never mind, Bessy."

"It won't take a minute."

"I don't want it."

"How's that?" she asked sullenly.

"I had déjeuner out."

"Oh, you had your dirgennay out again! Who with? You've taken to dirgennaying out a good deal, haven't you? Jolly for me, I'm sure—stuck at 'ome with the kid while you're enjoying yourself? Seems to me you're all alike."

"Does it?"

"Yes, it does," she said angrily, imitating his inflexion; "yes, it does, Mr. Sneerer! And I tell you more; I don't believe there's a decent one among the lot of you. Do you hear?"

"Oh?"

"*I* saw you the other day in the rue Scribe, with two women. Very classy they were—to look at. You didn't see *me,* did you? But *I* saw *you!* Who were they? Answer me that."

beauty, neither. Find better figures than hers in any life class, for all her swank. Any girl who ain't his wife, that's it! So long as she ain't his wife, any girl's good enough for a man. I could look like it, too, if you gave me the money to do it on. 'Won't have me speak about her'? Who do you think you're talking to? I've a good mind to smack your face!"

He clasped his hands on his head, and lay motionless.

"I'm tired," he repeated, wearily. "For God's sake, shut up! I want to go to sleep."

But it wasn't true—he wanted to think; he wanted to curse himself and die. In memory he was re-living the night of his first meeting with her: an English girl in a divan off the boulevard St. Martin—insulted, on the evening of his presence, by a French student. He recalled the enthusiasm with which he had knocked the man down; the general row—the cry of "English chaps forward!" She wept, and blessed him, on the pavement, at two o'clock in the morning. It transpired that she was virtuous; and he afforded the quarter another example of "the English eccentricity." After reflection, he offered to send her back to London. She had been unhappy there—she wept again, and didn't want to go. He supported her until she found employment

as a model. She was pretty; was the end surprising? She thought she was in love with him —let him see as much—and he was in love with romance. Whom had he to study? Life with her would be "very jolly"! It was a boy's infatuation for bohemia, while bohemia was foreign to him. Its front had been delightful. He married her. This was the back of it.

She picked up the paper, and he regarded her under lowered lids. She was pretty still, but he hated every expression on her face. He hated her every attitude, and the notes of her laugh. Every little harmless habit that she had made his nerves ache.

It was half-past four. This evening he would

THE LADY OF LYONS'

THE jovial solicitor who smacked his clients on the back had absconded, and the minor poet had no longer fifty pounds per annum. Although he was a minor poet, which—strangely enough—is a term of contempt in this country, though we are enjoined to be grateful for even small mercies, he was as human as minor novelists and minor critics, and he suffered. Also he woke; he realised how small had been the world's demand for the wares in which he dealt—he acknowledged that for twenty years he had been living on his little income, not on his little books.

His name was Smith. It was, perhaps, one of the reasons why his poetry was unread. Only a reviewer possessed of unusual courage could have discovered "the great poetry of Mr. Smith." Only a poet devoid of commercial instincts could have failed to adopt a nom de guerre.

In the face of disaster Mr. Smith did not make precisely this reflection, but he reflected painfully that a lack of commercial ability was no longer a matter to be recognised with a smile. He stood among the daffodils in the village garden, and

advice of friends.
though a writing ma
pathetic. They all
assured him warmly
cessities in mind.
might rely upon their
of a trustful disposit
the daffodils, encoura

And they withered
gram.

When they hung th
again. This time his
to dinner, but they p
should overlook it, tha
words, that he was a
"You have no experi
frankly. "You are int
experience, Robert." \
in the groove that we ou

r an office in Lombard Street, and as he called
appointment, a clerk showed him promptly
Mr. Hutton's private room.

The business man who received him had once
en a little boy in a sailor suit, and he and Rob-
t had played together in a nursery. To-day he
d numerous financial irons in the fire, and one
them required an obedient gentleman to watch

Affection suggested Robert for the post.
he duties were simple, and the salary was slight,
t if the iron came out in good condition, there
is to be a slice of the iron, too.

They chatted for a long while. Robert was
mitted to some confidences about the other
ns—the patents, and the shares, and the con-
ssions. All the time that he listened he was
eing the business man as a little boy in a sailor
it again, and was awestruck to hear the little
y talking so glibly of such mysteries. Blankly
felt that he himself had omitted to grow up;
decided that people were right in declaring
at he had no experience; it appeared to him
ddenly that he had learnt nothing in his life.
ut, of course, he had learnt many things, though
ver the most important one—how to make
oney.

Often they were interrupted by the telephone
ll, and during one of the colloquies on the tele-

phone Mr. Hutton seemed depressed. Robert feared he was being browbeaten until he hung up the receiver, and announced, smiling, that he had "made five hundred pounds by that conversation." It was miraculous. Robert had not made five hundred pounds by twenty years of work.

"Let's go out and get a cup of coffee," said Mr. Hutton, and piloted the poet through a maze of alleys to a retiring doorway. "What will you have to drink?" The poet discovered that after two o'clock "a cup of coffee" in the City is generally a synonym for a whisky-and-soda.

The little bar was crowded, and he was surprised at seeing such a number of business men doing nothing so leisurely. One man to whom he

[r. Hutton remarked that he had "sometimes ade as much as a thousand pounds by dropping there." Robert reeled.

Soon he went every day to the strange land here man talked a language that he did not now. It had been decided that he should watch e iron in the neighbourhood, so that Mr. Hutn might extend a guiding hand without discomrt, and an office was rented in Eastcheap. astcheap is a sour-smelling thoroughfare into hich dirty loafers emerge from the courts of illingsgate in order that they may have more om to spit. Distressing as Robert found it to in the office, he found it more distressing to out.

Of course not many people see the City. yriads saw it once, but that was when they me there in their youth. Few are to be disvered in the City who remember how it looks. ccasionally a clerk in his first berth may be und who sees the City, but he is not promised the casual searcher, for City clerks as a body e observant in the streets of one thing only. hey observe neckties. This passion, to which e hosiers of the district pander inordinately, as displayed to the poet between the hours of e and two, wet or fine. From desk to food, om food to desk, streamed the black multiude,

windows pe
an effort—it becam

Robert's eyes hac
did see the City, an
had poetry to tell;
try to tell it. He w
and commercially u
took him a long tim
years he had believe
he had done with illu
its grave, and the Fa
on the top. Yet he t
The funeral was ove
embraced a new car
Although he repeated
could not prevent its
There were moments

Often, as he forced
it walked beside him.
his preserver in the

On the other hand, the Employed were served by clean, quiet girls instead of by sleezy, vociferous waiters.

One afternoon he lunched at an establishment that he had not tried before. The ghost had been insistent all the morning. He found a vacant seat, hung up his hat, and examined the bill of fare. He was in one of the more modest restaurants of Messrs. Lyons, and around him young men and women with blank faces chumped beefsteak pudding, and read sixpenny editions of the novels that are written for them. The girl beside him ordered apple-tart. Her voice was pleasant, and momentarily he regretted that in reading she leant her cheek upon her palm, for she hid her profile. It should have been a pretty profile, to match her voice. Moved by an impulse of curiosity, he glanced at the page she pondered, and then he dropped the menu: she was reading his own verse!

"Good God!" he exclaimed.

"I *beg* your pardon?" said the girl, surveying him with dignity.

"I apologise," stammered the poet; "I was startled."

Evidently she found his excuse inadequate, and he was thankful that at this moment they were left with the table to themselves. "I meant

that I was startled to see the book you were reading," he explained.

"I see nothing startling in it," said the lady, still frigid.

He felt that she might have expressed herself more happily, but hew as in no position to rebuke her. "Of course in one sense it isn't startling at all," he concurred; "in fact, it's very feeble."

"I am afraid I can't agree with you," rejoined his reader; and the haughtiness of her contradiction warmed his heart.

"You can't mean you really like it?"

"I like it very much." She had grey eyes that challenged him scornfully; he sunned himself in her disdain.

"Did you buy it?" he asked, a tremor in his

"To tell you the truth, I am glad you like the book."

"Eh?" she said. "Why?"

"Because I wrote it."

It should have been a dramatic moment, but the girl bungled her part and disbelieved him.

Fully five minutes were devoted to convincing her. However, the five minutes brought such a flutter of pink to her cheeks, so tender a glow into her eyes, that the time was by no means wasted.

"I couldn't expect to meet a poet in the City," she pleaded.

"And certainly I couldn't expect to meet any Gentle Reader here," said Robert. He examined the slim volume ruefully.

"In such good condition, and only twopence!" he complained.

"If it had been more I mightn't have bought it," she said.

He found himself resigned to the book's having been marked down to twopence.

She told him that she wrote shorthand in an office in Cornhill. Eastcheap lay in the same direction, and after she had gone he felt that it would have been pleasurable to walk some of the way beside her.

He was sorry, too, that he had omitted to inquire if she irradiated the restaurant daily.

On the morrow he betook himself to Lyons' with hope. He descried the lady at a distant table, and it had the charm of vacant chairs. There was no reason why he should ignore them.

"You are often in the City, then?" she asked as he sat down.

"I come every day," said Robert; and seeing she was mystified, he added, "I am in an office here, like you."

But plainly this mystified her more still. "Do you mean you are in business?"

"Truly," he told her. "I think I shall have roast-beef."

"I should try the mutton," she said. "But you

"A curious thing about policemen," remarked the poet, "is that if you want a polite answer, you should avoid putting your question politely. They are, conspicuously, a class who respect rudeness. How long have you been coming to the City, to learn so much about it?"

"I have been coming to the City for nine years," she said, "and I have learnt a great deal. I know now where the Tower is, and which of the benches under the trees makes you feel most Harrison Ainsworthy. And I know the shop in Cornhill that sells the best twopenny tarts. They are small, but peerless."

"If you hadn't bought my verses you might have had another," sighed Robert. "Some day, when I have made my fortune, I shall give you one."

"Thank you," she said. "I suppose you know what you are looking at across the road?"

"I am looking at a bookshop," replied the poet.

"You were meant to see the Mansion House," demurred his guide, "where the Lord Mayor lives."

"I do not like Lord Mayors," said Robert; "they never ask me to their literary dinners."

"They are punished for it," said the girl. "Once a year at midnight they drop their little

To meet at luncheon
sometimes their confi
By dint of lunching
made time to reach t
approved her taste i
bench one day when t
him her history. He
place that she apologi
surprise was vast that

"Why," he cried, "
It is you who are to be
I to mourn in the City
here but the gift of mak
you have buried the divi
beautiful youth! Yo
pleasure in your life, y
ashamed."

Not long afterwards

commercial staidness; and added, irresponsibly, "I want to buy twopenny tarts."

It was just like him, to bid farewell to verse-making, and then to find his best poetry in the City. There are dreamers who would turn every opportunity to disadvantage.

But the iron is shaping so well that when it becomes a limited liability company with another manager, Robert's slice should be substantial.

We may imagine him going back to the daffodils.

It is not impossible that there will be orange blossoms.

And in the meantime there is certainly the luncheon hour.

THE THIRD M

Otto Van Norden wrote ballads that were popular; but to attain this eminence he had, in his youth, sacrificed commercial prospects which might easily have provided him with wealth. So he often lamented his choice of a career as a terrible mistake. Nevertheless, as he had some private means, his life was no martyrdom, though he aspired vainly to a mansion and a motor. He had pleasant rooms, a good tailor, was frequently to be seen at the second-best restaurants, and spent as much of his time as possible on the Con-

music pirates hadn't begun to be so industrious, it is possible that he might have escaped regret, even in the suburb that looks like a cemetery.

To write popular songs in a country where stolen music was exposed for sale on every kerbstone buttered no parsnips; and for matrimony the composer's private means were a tight fit. Not many quarter-days had elapsed before he felt that his marriage had been as big a blunder as his profession. "Music and marriage!" sighed Van Norden to the long, sad, empty roads of Dulwich; "but for music and marriage how well off I might have been!" And then it struck him that both the calamities of his life begun with an M.

Some men might have attached no importance to it; Otto Van Norden was impressed. He said that it was queer, this recurrence of the initial M—he was of the opinion that it "meant something." Perhaps there was a warning to be derived? Yes, that must be it! If a third catastrophe occurred, doubtless the third, too, would be alliterative—and perhaps fatal. M was evidently an initial ominous to him, an initial to be shunned. From that moment he grew nervous of things beginning with an M. He abandoned the wish to revisit Mentone; and he would not have attempted a march if his publishers had begged for one.

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als, and a water-r
of a son and heir
him "Marmaduk
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equences of her thoughtlessness, the composer's relief was deeper than any who mock presentiments can understand.

This was the first M that had menaced him since he perceived the significance of the initial to him, and nothing else noteworthy occurred until November. One day in November when a pink-and-white bassinette was in readiness for the little "fellow's" advent, the master of the house awoke feeling as if he had a marble under his tongue. He did not mention the matter to Violet, but breakfasting with such an unfamiliar mouth was so discomforting that he sent the servant up to Dr. Lachlan with a request to him to look in during the morning.

"I don't know what's happened to my mouth, Lachlan," he said; "it's for all the world as if a marble had rolled underneath my tongue in the night."

"Let's have a look at it," said the medical man. 'Ah! Yes. Y-e-s, that hasn't come in the night —it's been coming for some time."

"Is it serious?"

"No, not necessarily. It wants removing."

"Removing?" echoed Van Norden. "What do you mean by 'removing'—you don't mean 'operating'? Don't you think a—a good lotion ——?"

the composer, disn
ter? People sink
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"My God!" excl
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He was now inter
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such things. Howe
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passed unnoticed by
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could have been more
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less favourable to

"Nobody has come yet; sit down and make yourself at home."

"Thank you," said the nurse. She added sympathetically, putting on her apron. "It's a trying time for you, I hear, what with one thing and another, sir?"

Lachlan came in, as blithely as if it were a party. "Well, how are we this morning?" he asked. "Good spirits? That's right! You'll be glad you've had this done—you'll feel much better, once it's over.—Ah, here's the man I'm waiting for! 'Morning, Major."

"Er, Dr. Major, pleased to meet you," murmured the composer, feebly untruthful. Already the bedroom was taking a strange aspect to him, the aspect of a hospital. Bandages and bottles seemed to have sprung from nowhere. Lachlan poured fluids briskly in basins before the window, and Major set out mysterious articles from a black bag on the chest of drawers. The paraphernalia spread incessantly, and the nurse continued, as if by magic, to produce sheets, and cans of hot water without having quitted the room.

"I think we'll move the bed, Nurse," said Lachlan, and they pulled it into the middle of the floor. The anæsthetist felt the patient's pulse, and applied the stethoscope; and Van Norden noticed for the first time that the pattern of the

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It was not unpleasa
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His next impre
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ing to be congratulat

a baby's bleat. His mouth remained open with amazement, and gigantic fingers suddenly thrust something sickening into it, while an unfamiliar voice made ridiculous noises at him.

Consternation held Van Norden spellbound. There were seconds in which he feared that he was insane. Presently another thought assailed him, one so startling that his blood ran cold. Minutes passed, minutes too terrible for words to paint. He gathered the fortitude to examine as much of his person as was exposed: the hands belonging to him were minute, the hands of an infant! He stared at them aghast and shuddering. There could be no doubt of it—he had died under the operation, and had been born again! All that was natural enough, but the unforeseen and fearful thing was that he still remembered.

He was once more a baby. Whose? The immense import of the question throbbed in him. Where he lay he could see no more of the room than the ceiling, and he was unable to judge whether he had been reincarnated in a mansion or a hovel. There had been a royal princess expecting a baby, he reflected. "Great Scotland Yard!" thought Van Norden, "suppose I'm Royalty this time?" But the remaining pessimism in him rejected the fancy almost as it rose. "Too good to be true," he mused; "I expect my fa-

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"Yes," said the v
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dered what the furniture would fetch, and if Violet would be enabled to bring him up properly. Perhaps his father-in-law would come to her assistance?—his "grandfather," he ought to say now! It would be a pretty kettle of fish if his widow—that was to say his "mother"—were left to her own resources. What would become of him? A board school, and a junior clerkship! "I suppose it's entirely problematical whether I shall even inherit my musical talent?" mused the unhappy infant. "It's a nice lookout for me, I must say!"

"But there," added the woman, "a girl baby always does keep quieter than a boy—I'm always thankful to see it a girl. Ookytooky, then! Ain't I, my precious? Lor, the blessed lamb's choking!"

Van Norden had indeed turned purple in the face. A girl! Culminating calamity, a girl! The blankness of the girl's outlook, the poverty of the marriage that she must expect to make, was overwhelming. "Now, why," Van Norden asked herself passionately, "*why* has this thing happened to me? Among all the births that were taking place in the world, couldn't they have spared me a decent one? I don't harp on a palace, but, say, reasonable advantages? Opulent people are having sons every minute, yet *I* must

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ascinated her extremely. At first she had re-
arded it with disdain. Even when she recog-
ised its suitability to her physical needs, she had
nerely tolerated the thing as a disagreeable ne-
essity. This contempt, this suction under pro-
est, was very brief. Soon she grew to relish the
ottle, to clamour for it when it was late. Then,
oo, she was able to extract amusement from a
oral-and-bells, and was again engrossed by the
cking of a watch. "Marvellous!" thought Van
Norden, while she hovered at the parting of the
ays, "marvellous thing, Nature, upon my
ord!" But, a trifle humiliated at moments like
nese, she would throw the coral, or watch, on the
oor and set up a howl. The devoted Violet often
nistook the humiliation for a pin, and undressed
er—an indignity which annoyed Van Norden
nore still.

Before she was six weeks old Van Norden had
eased to consider the financial position, and ac-
epted without questioning who provided; she be-
an to yield to the charm of the bottle and the
atch unreservedly, and had scarcely a remaining
are. Only while she plucked at Violet's crape,
ne past whispered in her, and a dim conscious-
ess that the relations between her mother and
erself were involved clouded the infantile brow.

"What's she thinking about, a love?" Violet

would murmur, swaying her to and fro. "Doesn't she look worried, a pet!" And from the lap that was once Van Norden's wife's, Van Norden would raise great eyes to her solemnly.

When eight or nine months had passed, this glimmer of memory, which had then become nearly extinct, was fanned to ardour by a painful circumstance. They had gone to Dieppe with Violet's parents, and in the hotel Violet made the acquaintance of a Major somebody. The acquaintance had progressed when Van Norden was first brought in contact with him in the garden, and the gentleman paid the pretty widow marked attentions, and grinned at her baby propitiatingly.

"Jolly little chap," remarked the Major, wor-

troubles." She glanced significantly at her weeds, and sighed.

"Oh, ah, of course I understand; I—I can sympathise, I can indeed. But you shouldn't think of your troubles too much, Mrs. Van Norden, if I may say so—you should buck up. Life, after all, is——" He struggled with his eyeglass and failed to enunciate his sentiments on life.

"Life is very, very strange," said Violet, gazing pensively at the sea.

"Isn't it?" said the Major eagerly. "Just fancy, it's only a week since I met you, what?"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," she murmured.

"*I* am," said the Major, "I think of it lots. It seems so rum, don't you know, that I'd never seen you till a week ago. Don't you think that sometimes people meet who were meant to meet, and that, for them, a week scores more than years and years of society between people who er—well, who only happen to meet because they're introduced, don't you know?"

Van Norden lay communing with herself. In the little brain the voice of the past cried for recognition. She eyed the adults darkly, agitated by the sense of a tragedy which she sought piteously to define. The soul of the baby sprawling on the cushions was symptomatic of marital jealousy, though the mind failed to diagnose the dis-

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fancy followed Violet and the Major into the Casino.

Soon she employed the only weapon in her power, and kicked and screamed as often as an attempt was made to remove her from Violet's presence. By this means she witnessed much that would otherwise have been hidden from her—was indeed a witness of her successor's proposal. Stricken with resentment, the babe that had once been the widow's husband lay in her lap while the Major begged her to be his wife.

"I know it's a bit early for me to speak," he stammered, "but I can't help it—if I were to let you go away without telling you how much I care for you, I might never see you again. Only give me a word—I'll wait. I'll be as patient as I can, but tell me that there's a chance for me."

She was silent a long while; evidently she was much moved. At last she murmured, "I don't know what to say."

"Can't you care a bit for me?"

"Ah, it isn't that!" she owned tearfully.

"Darling! Dearest!"

"Sh!" she said, "you oughtn't. It's so soon; and—oh, I don't know, there's so much to consider. There's my child." She clasped Van Norden protectively.

"You don't suppose I'd be rough on it?" cried

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Soon afterwards Vic
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"Yes, we shall hav
doctor.

There was a morn
came to the cot and

and Van Norden lay staring through the window at the brilliant sky.

The room began to acquire a novel air. The nurse produced sheets and cans of hot water from nowhere; the surgeon poured fluids in basins briskly. The Major set out mysterious articles from a black bag on the chest of drawers. The sky developed a pattern of pink mushrooms and bunches of vermicelli—and Van Norden came to his senses.

He saw Lachlan looking at him.

"Well, how do you feel?" asked Lachlan. 'We've got rid of your Myxoma for you. And your wife's first-rate. You've a little son waiting downstairs—fine boy, too!"

"Fine boy?" murmured the composer drowsily. 'No, I was a fine girl."

"Not quite come round yet, Nurse," said Lachlan; "let him sleep the rest of it off, and he'll be as right as rain!"

THE Bishop
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classical features, and the dignity of his carriage, would have compelled attention even if he had been a mere man. He never said anything noteworthy, but he voiced the sentiments of the unthinking in stately language. This made him generally admired. It is not to be inferred that he was insincere—he had been granted a popular mind; he shared with the majority a strong aversion from disagreeable truths. His widest reflections were bounded by the word "Unpleasant," and every truth that was unpleasant was to the Bishop of Westborough "one of those things that are better left undiscussed." He had a warm affection for this phrase, which occurred in all his articles for the cultured reviews. It was a phrase that suggested much earnestness of thought, while it spared him the exertion of thinking at all.

Domestically he had been no less fortunate than in his mental limitations. He possessed a little wife, who listened to him with the utmost patience, and he had seen both his girls make brilliant matches in their first season. The history of the bridegroom had, in each case, been "one of those things that are better left undiscussed." Accordingly, the Bishop boasted a grateful heart; in fact when he reflected how abundantly Providence had blessed him, he was

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"No, indeed—I m
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t is!" She regarded him as if she were be-
onfronted by a miracle.
rtly because he was very vain, and partly be-
Miss Clarges was very good-looking, the
at she forgot almost as soon as it was spoken
ingered caressingly with the Bishop. Sitting
e Palace one afternoon with nothing to do,
ound himself scribbling "Act I.—A Draw-
Room." He had no definite intention of con-
ng, still less had he a definite plot; but like
one who is deficient in self-criticism, he
e with prodigious facility, and his first act
inished in a few days.
iss Clarges had been a good deal surprised
ceive a semi-humorous note from the Bishop
Vestborough, reminding her of their conver-
n and hinting that he would be glad to have
pinion of "a dramatic bantling." Tea and
e-à-tête followed in the lady's boudoir. She
d Act I all that she had dreaded, and told
t was most original. Beaming with impor-
, he perpetrated Act II, and read her that.
was contemplating a season of management,
in sanguine moments reflected that a prac-
hand might knock the Bishop's comedy into
thing like shape, and that the Bishop's name
e bills would be well worth having. So she
ed various suggestions about the leading

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As for her, it was
career that she had
bishop. At the begi
his reputation—mus

ıe considered him a great man; his pro-
belief in himself, supported by a nation's
imposed on her. To have made a con-
f a pillar of the Church flattered her inor-
y; the novelty of the situation had its ef-
the actress, too—and, to her unspeakable
ıent, Kitty Clarges fell in love with the

as at this juncture that circumstances had
him to mortify the rector of Sweetbay.
affair makes me doubt whether I ought
eed with my own play," he admitted to
afternoon.
dear friend!" She meant "What rot!"
no longer said "What rot!" even to other
es; and she wore dove-coloured gowns, and
en to hear him preach. The higher life
ittle trying, but she liked to feel worthier

action in the matter may be misconstrued.
se, I've simply deferred to the local preju-
ıt it may be thought that *I* disapprove of
ı's tendencies. If I figured as a dramatist
a little later, I might be placed in an am-
s position. . . . Perhaps we might over-
ıe difficulty by a pseudonym?"
ooked blank. "Your lordship's name will

too," she added.

"Well, we must
clinking the ice in
me—though I fear
privileges. By the
ways offer the auth

"She offered you
Clarges, laughing;
your choice. But yc
the comedy up, do y

The Bishop's eye
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tion; if I withhold
from the piece, I sh

"You are very ge
think I could sav 'v

was conscious that she had soared into the higher life indeed.

"You are scarcely treating me as the dear friend you allow me to believe myself," urged the Bishop, missing the greatest compliment of his life.

"Oh!" she said under her breath.

"I should be serving my own ends. And besides——"

"Besides—what?"

"It would make me very happy to think that I served *you*."

Her eyelids fell. "You *have* served me."

"I rejoice to hear it. May I ask how?"

"You've served me by your friendship. You've given me different thoughts, taken me out of myself, done me good—in some ways." She sighed deeply. "I've learnt that there are so much *realer* things than the shams that satisfied me before we met. I've been a very . . . worldly woman; you know, don't you?"

"Few human beings are stronger than temptations, child," he said melodiously; "and yours must have been many."

"I used to want you to think me better than I am. Now I—I do and I don't. Oh, I can't explain!"

She laid a gen
"Why not put me
"I daren't," she
"Am I so hard?
She shook her h
"What then?"
"I'm so bad," sl
little nearer to him
"Why do you say
op; "you hurt me!"
"Haven't you m
"I would have ha
"Oh, my past?" s
in his arms. "My
now!"

Much may be don
he persuaded himsel
copal.

"My child," he mu
tenderly. "I will n

younger man, I might doubt the righteousness of owning that the attachment is mutual; but the years bring wisdom and at my age we see deeply. My duty is to help you, and I realise that I can help you only by a perfect candour. I acknowledge, therefore, that you are indeed most dear to me."

"Oh, you are great!" she exclaimed. "I shall see you still? Promise you'll come here—don't let me lose you! Say it! Say again you love me!"

"You are indeed most dear to me," repeated the Bishop, who thought this way of putting it sounded more innocent. He got up and paced the room with agitation. "You ask me if I will still come here. I do not disguise from myself that many might think that I should answer 'no'; many might hold it my duty to desert you in the conflict that must be waged, to leave you to bear the brunt of it alone. I am not one of them. Flight is at best the refuge of a coward. Doughtier than to flee temptation is to confront and conquer it." He swept the hair from his brow with a noble gesture. "I recognise that my highest duty is to share your struggles—to solace and sustain you. Yes, I will come! We have a mighty battle before us, you and I—and we will fight side by side, my comrade, till we win!"

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about them was f
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Baker Barling, wh
Club for the house
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Miss Clarges was
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"out" when the lad

hands, prevented her adopting either course. She could only pray for the ability to persuade the visitor that her suspicions were unfounded, and she felt sick with misgiving as the day wore on.

How extraordinary of the woman! Whether she meant to be offensive, or pathetic, what a folly of her to come! On the stage, of course, such scenes were usual, and Kitty Clarges knew exactly how she would have to behave there—that she would be first mocking, then attentive, and finally moved to repentance. But the theatre was one thing, and life was another. In real life it was preposterous of a person to seek an interview and plead for the return of a husband's heart; in real life it was impossible to return a heart, even if one wished to do it. And in this case, the wish was lacking; Miss Clarges was so infatuated by the Bishop that she had even been jealous to remember that another woman had a legal claim to him.

At the tingle of the bell, she caught her breath. She had never seen "the other woman," and mixed with her apprehension was a strong curiosity to know what his wife was like. "Mrs. Meadows," announced the maid. The actress turned to the doorway, trembling, and saw that the lady was a dowdy little woman with a dreary

Miss Clarges? I
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Won't you sit dow
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The start, the be
admirable. "My .
"You need not t
lady quietly "becau

es, rising. "I have the honour to be one of his lordship's friends, he has been pleased to discuss his comedy with me. Not unnatural, I think? Especially as I hope to produce the piece. As for . . . what you say, there has never been a word, a syllable—our conversation might have been phonographed for all London to hear." The indignation of her voice quivered into pain. "I wouldn't have had this happen for the world—I can't understand it!" She struggled with a sob, and suppressed it proudly. "It's cruel!"

"I don't wonder that he admires you," said his wife thoughtfully; "you have great talent. But I have seen one of your letters to him. Here it is!"

Miss Clarges gasped, and looked at it. She sat down again very slowly. "All right," she said. "I *am* fond of your husband! Well?"

"It was finding your letter that made me write to you. I heard weeks ago that he was mad about you, but the letter showed me that *you* cared for him. Oh, I know that I oughtn't to have written! I considered a long time before I made up my mind. But there was so much at stake, I thought you might help me. If you will listen——"

"What for?" exclaimed Miss Clarges. "What's the use of my listening? Even if I promised you

And I shouldn't r
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wept and went down on your knees to me—I couldn't say, 'Because the right's all on your side, he shall never think about me any more'?"

"You misunderstand the object of my visit," said Mrs. Meadows meekly. "I didn't come to weep to you; I didn't come to beg you to say that he should never think about you any more. I came to beg you to tell me what you find in him to love."

"Eh?" ejaculated Miss Clarges.

"I came to beg you to tell me what you find in him to love," repeated the elder woman in plaintive tones. "You see, to you he is only an episode; but unless I choose to make a scandal—and I have daughters to consider—*I* must expect to spend many more years with him. If you will help me to discover some attraction in him, it will make life far easier for me."

Kitty Clarges sat staring at her dumbly. "You f-find no attraction in him?" she stammered at last.

"It is unconventional of me to admit it to you; but, as I say, there is so much at stake—I feel justified in asking your assistance. To me he is tedious beyond words to tell. If you would explain why you adore him, if you would show me some merit, some spark of talent, or wit, or humour, something to make his pretensions less in-

much—a moderately
woman like me has
Bishop is unfortunat
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then, I knew that the
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Miss Clarges! you are
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you couldn't gush so
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"Maiden-bloom" stood out in unbecoming blotches. To hear that she idolised a man whom this little provincial in last's year's fashions disdained as a bore, robbed her of speech. She had not believed there could be such depths of humiliation in the world.

Some seconds passed, while the suppliant watched her wistfully.

"If you don't care for your husband, I'm afraid I couldn't teach you to love him."

"No, no; I only thought you might help me to put up with him; I'm not unreasonable—I'd be grateful for small mercies. If you'd mention a ray of interest in him, I'd keep my eyes on that, and make the most of it. . . . You're not vexed with me for coming?"

"Oh, not at all; I—I suppose you've been very . . . amiable, our interview has been rather quaint; I'm sorry I can't oblige you."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Meadows, "it can't be helped. But I must say I'm disappointed! When I found out there was a woman in love with him, it simply amazed me! I felt it only right to consult you—it seemed such an opportunity to improve matters at home. Still, there it is, if you can't tell me, you can't!" She was very downcast. "Then I'll say 'Good-afternoon.' "

Good-bye, Miss Cla
Bishop that I called.

She sighed herself

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was a fool incapable o
and that Mrs. Meadov
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think her a genius. K
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gowns began to get on her nerves, and gradually she discarded them. Once, when the Bishop proposed to visit her, she told him that she would be lunching out. A few days later she wrote that unforeseen circumstances denied her the hope of producing his comedy. His urgent letter of inquiry remained unanswered. When he called for an explanation she was "not at home."

Lucy, who looked ve
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—wonderful! But w
could make such pret
marry Dora? My da

spoke of it. . . . She had been so poor and friendless; she may have fancied that it would be ingratitude to ask for more than I had done? And the business was my father's in his lifetime; I could not afford to quarrel with him. She must have known that? She must have known I could not afford to quarrel with him, even if I had been enxious to marry her?

Fervently, though it is all past and the shrub that was planted on her grave has grown big beyond the railings, I hope she did not grieve! I have wondered many times—since. She was so gentle and so pure, that perhaps she often suffered, while she smiled and kissed me? . . . And she died and was buried. And the child—the baby Lucy—was given to strangers to be nursed. How long ago it seems—in another life. But I wish that Lucy might have called me "Papa!" . . . My cigar is out.

Rebecca: she was slimmer when her family made up the match between us. Yes, and good-looking. And my sorrow for Dora had faded—two or three years had passed. I was my own master then, and business was good. . . . I was happy with Rebecca. I gave her lots of diamonds, and the other women envied her; and at home we got on very well. If we had had children of our own— I wonder!

which she said "yes."
for such a generosity
of Dora!

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I regret! Ah, God forgive me, I regret with all my soul, and would be young once more, with Dora by my side; I would see her by my side to-day! . . . How hot it is! the window should be open such a night. . . . Rebecca has come downstairs. She wears her black satin, and powders her nose again before the mirror. She persuades me to accompany her; I shall be "dull alone"?

"My head aches. Otherwise—— By-by, enjoy yourself, my dearest!"

wife, but I would n
suddenly, I want to
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I had no child, no in
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with other things.

Later, I began to
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recollection remained a secret joy. I could forget by this time and amuse myself, had my vanities and vexations, was socially like any other woman, entertained in ordinary ways, but clandestinely I still revisited the past. So thirteen years went by—and, unsuspected by my dearest friends, I communed mentally with a young husband, who, in these reveries, had grown no older.

I tried to bear in mind that he was older—much older than I—but I could think of him only as I had seen him last. I repeated, marvelling, that he must be over forty now, but in my memories I laughed and talked with the personality that I had known. Although I told myself that I might pass him unrecognised, the face that I smiled to in my visions was the face of the young man that he used to be.

I believe you have sometimes wondered who your rival was. He was the man that my divorced husband once had been.

Last September I was at Pourville. One morning in the hotel, glancing at an English paper, I read that he had just arrived in Paris. I meant to leave for Paris, myself, towards the end of the week, and I sat thinking how very soon he and I would be passing through the same streets. Doubtless we had drifted close to each other

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the book eager to read some of it, but I fell to dreaming over the fly-leaf, wondering who Janet Herbertson was.

While I wondered, she returned to her seat.

"Have I taken your book?"

"Oh, thank you!"

She was a girl to whom I had already spoken once or twice; I had not known her name, and I don't suppose that she knew mine. I call her a "girl" because she was unmarried, but she could not have been more than four or five years younger than myself—a girl with a fine figure and abundant health, but, to my mind at least, no features worth mentioning. Her eyes were shallow, and her hair came near to being sandy. Most of her remarks were prefaced by "Of course," and she expressed herself in very incisive tones. I had noticed her one day with an easel among the gorse at Varangeville Plage, and I set her down as an amateur, with means.

"You didn't go to the Links, then?" I said.

"Not this afternoon, I was too much interested in this. Have you read any of it?"

"No, I only just saw it. It's a new one of his, isn't it?"

"It isn't out yet at all; this is what's called an 'advance copy'; Mr. Owen sent it to me yesterday."

"Some of it?" S
fensive smile.

"Of course, the b
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an amateur now, the

"I suppose so."

"Emerson— Hav

"Whom's it by?" I
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"I think I follow y

She unbent. "If y
presently?"

don't you? Well, you can have it in the morning."

"If you're sure I shouldn't be robbing you?"

"Quite. Besides, I've read most of it already, in manuscript."

"Really? It must be very fascinating to know a poet so well as that!"

"Oh, I know Gilbert Owen *very* well! If you're staying next week, you'll see him here;" she tittered self-consciously: "I've told him that the rest would do him good."

"Here?"

"Yes, but not till Wednesday; I didn't want him till I had finished my picture. Of course, I shan't have much time for my work after he comes."

"I shall be gone by then," I said. "What a pity! I suppose there's no chance of his coming before?"

"Oh, no, he'll come on the day I fixed."

"Wednesday?"

"Yes."

"To oblige me, you might let him come a little sooner," I laughed.

"I'm afraid I can't do that. You had better stay."

"I wish it were possible. You must be immensely proud of your influence?"

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"Numéro deux!"

"What's he like?

"Eh? Oh, it's s
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said. "Wasn't there

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ago," she said sharpl

"It must have been hideous," she added, "for a man of his intellect to be married to a fool."

The begonias were making my eyes ache. "Awful," I muttered. I wondered what in the world he could find to admire in her. "Well, you shall be left in peace. I've a sudden fancy for Cinq. It's my lucky number."

I didn't play. I sat watching the horses swirl, and hating her—hating my idiocy in having written to him. I was jealous. Is it heartless of me to say that to you, dear man? I must be frank. I was jealous of her, and when I had the honesty to own it at last, I was glad that the letter had gone. I asked myself if she had more attractions than I; I asked myself—it was abominable, you'll despise me!—if I couldn't teach him to humiliate her.

There was no note for me at Meurice's when I arrived on Friday, but I had an instinct that he would come next day. I spent the whole of Saturday morning before the mirror, I wonder my maid didn't give me notice; I had my hair dressed in a new way, and snapped at her till she cried before I was satisfied with it. Afterwards I decided that it didn't suit me, and my hair was done as usual, after all. The same with my things, I felt myself a sight in everything—my frock had to be changed three times.

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"It was very goo
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"Ah!"

"Really! How a

"All right. Wor
He twitched his t

"I've never stayed there. It's very quiet, isn't it?"

"Oh, a mite of a place, just the hotel and the sea. There are beautiful walks, though."

"You used to be fond of walking."

"I am still."

"You're looking wonderfully well."

"You look very well, too."

"Do you think so?" he asked. "Fact? Not so much older as you expected?"

"N—no," I said.

"My hair's going, eh? begins a little further back than it used to, doesn't it?"

"A little more intellectual brow, perhaps! You should try a specialist."

"I've tried a dozen. They're no use. The first time you go, the man tells you that you'll be bald directly if you don't use his lotions. 'Ah, humph! Well, I'll do all that *can* be done for you.' And you buy bottles at half-a-guinea each, and find they make no difference. Then, when you go again to say there isn't any improvement, he exclaims, 'My! I didn't hope to do so much in the time. This is splendid. *Look* at all that new hair coming up!' Of course you like to believe him, and you go on buying his rubbish for twelve months. A hair specialist lives by his knowledge of human nature, not his knowledge of the hair."

I knew that he was talking for effect and I laughed, to gratify him. He glanced round the room.

"You're very comfortable here."

"Yes; this is where I generally stay."

"Are you often in Paris?"

"Not very often; I'm in London a good deal."

"*I* never go to London, excepting to see a publisher; the atmosphere is fatal. In London I'm commonplace. Positively. The murk gets on my genius. Give me a blue sky and God's sunshine! All artistic natures are very susceptible to external influences. You know that?"

"I remember you used to say so."

"It's just the same with me now; I haven't altered, I feel just as I felt when I was a boy.

him grief-stricken. "It must have been an awful blow to you?" I asked. "Oh, he had got rather tedious," he answered; "Charlie was a bit of an ass." He proceeded to tell me an anecdote of a woman who had paid him a fulsome compliment. While he aimed eagerly at making an impression—while his sole thought was to show me how brilliant and fascinating he remained—he revealed to me that every tendency I had once condemned had developed to a salient feature of his character, that every blemish I had once regretted had grown to be a glaring fault.

I am sure that vanity would have urged him to gain my admiration, even if he had found me faded and a frump; I am sure that he had come with that desire; but his eyes told me he found me charming, and his note, by-and-by, I think, was unpremeditated.

"I wish I had been worthier of you," he said. He said it very beautifully, but late. So much too late to give me any pleasure!

"Don't let us talk about the past," I murmured.

"My coming here to-day will make me regret it more still."

"I hope not—I didn't mean to give you pain. Perhaps it was foolish of me to write."

"Ah, you know I am glad you wrote. Only—

It won't be the last time I see you? Don't say that." His gaze dwelt on me sentimentally. "I wish it were the first! If I had just been presented to you, we might have become great friends, Nan. Who knows?"

"I trust we *are* friends."

He sighed. "It's noble of you to say so, but the 'friendship' you can give me now is only a gentler name for 'pardon.' I might have looked forward to something sweeter if we had just met, I might have won your esteem, your confidence —perhaps even your love. I wonder if you know what it has meant to me this afternoon, to be here like this—with a wall of formality between me and the woman who used to be my wife? The torture, the shame of it! My heart is full of emo-

"It's my fault for making you come here."

"No, no. But let me see you again. Tell me I may come to-morrow."

"I can't."

"It's Sunday—let us lunch at Versailles, or Saint-Germain, or somewhere—let us go into the country. I know a perfectly lovely spot we can motor to in an hour, and the hotel is really quite decent. Say you will!"

"I'm expecting people to-morrow."

"Well, Monday? Tuesday? You'll be free on Tuedsay?"

I shook my head.

"Then Wednesday? I was going to the sea on Wednesday. but I'll stay. Promise to spare me Wednesday."

How easy it had been! I saw the sandy-haired girl's mortification, saw her fuming, week by week, while he dangled at my side. My petty plan had triumphed—but it brought no joy.

"I am leaving Paris," I said. And when he went, I think he was conscious that, after all, his visit had been a failure.

But he was speedily at ease again, I know, for those who have no deep affections avoid much of life's unhappiness. For the selfish is the peace. The suffering was for the woman who had felt—for me, to whom the reconciliation had proved

the spell was gon
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middle-aged pose
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Best of men, ho
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THE CALL FROM THE PAST

ONCE there was a prosperous solicitor, and he had two sons. The elder he took into his office; the younger he sent to the Bar. The younger boy's name was Robert, and he was generally called "Bob." The elder boy's name was Edward, and no one ever called him "Ted."

Edward went to the office with satisfaction. He was a shrewd youth who made useful friends, and didn't allow pleasure to stand in the way of profit. Before he had been in the business two years he bullied the head clerk, and it was predicted that he would "go further than his father." Bob entered his profession negligently. He was a genial fellow who liked bohemian clubs, and wrote farces that were never produced. Before he had been at the Bar two years he succumbed to an unconquerable passion and went on the stage.

The stage had not then become the smartest vocation in England. Viscounts occasionally married dancing-girls, but socially that was as high as the theatre had climbed. It may be difficult for English people of to-day to credit it, but

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himself "Lawless."

with a Moral presented gratis to every purchaser, Bob would have had only two courses open to him. He would either have succeeded brilliantly and moved his father to tears of pride, or he would have found the discomforts unbearable and returned repentant. In reality he didn't succeed at all, and he had never been so happy in his life.

His sole regret was that the tour was short, for when it finished he was out of an engagement. He remained out of an engagement much longer than he had been in one, and subsisted on the parental allowance. The change from the flesh-pots of Regent's Park was severe, and if anything could have cooled his stage fever, it would have been cooled now, but it defied even semi-starvation. By-and-by he obtained another small part, and his temperature was higher still. Confidently he assured himself that by the time the allowance was withdrawn he would be independent of it. And that was where he erred.

At the end of the three years he was pacing the Strand. He had had hard luck, and old Mr. Blackstone was hard too. He stuck to his guns; Bob must shift by his own abilities henceforward, or Bob must go back to the Bar. Bob was foot-sore, hungry and penniless; Bob went back to the Bar.

Of course there was still his pen. His hopes as

an actor had been shivered, but to his ambitions as a dramatist he clung. His pen was the spar in the shipwreck. The night was black, but afar the footlights beamed. Buffeted as he was, he might regain them by his pen.

So he wrote more farces—farces and burlesques, and one or two melodramas as well. His father did not know that. Robert Blackstone, the budding barrister, preserved appearances; and Robert Lawless, the panting playwright, preserved his manuscripts—for they all came back. All, that is to say, with the exception of a farcical comedy which he had actually sold for twenty-five pounds but which had never been staged. Some of his work was good, but in England the chief qualifications for artistic success are commercial ability and the money to exploit

rather sore about it at first, presently forgave him. Bob began to look less like a Bob and more like a Robert. People noticed "what a strong resemblance there was between him and his brother." As an earnest young barrister he no longer frequented bohemian clubs. It was understood that one mustn't go round to Plowden Buildings any more and waste his time. Nobody said to him now, "Come and have a drink, old chap!" Occasionally someone might say, "Will you—er—take a glass of sherry, Mr. Blackstone?"

As the years passed, even that was seldom said. He had shaken off the dust of Plowden Buildings, and had chambers in Garden Court. His humour was becoming heavy. The mothers of marriageable daughters found it convulsing. He was spoken of as a man with a future, and dined at dreary houses. Old Blackstone died, and as Robert was making a handsome income he was mentioned in the will with abundant generosity. Wherefore he was rich. So was Edward the solicitor, who had a wife and three children now. Edward was proud of his brother; he wanted him to take silk, and to stand for Beckenhampton later. Robert was thinking of these things himself. His age was forty-one. And here ends the prologue.

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that—in stories.

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Edward was anim
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company; yet there was no doubt that Edward was quite as dull a dog as he had ever been. As they talked there, outside the Law Courts, Robert compassionated himself a little for not being bored by Edward.

He had been cheerful as he unrobed, but the remark he had caught lurked in his ears, and when he entered his chambers he found himself repeating it. "For the defendant," a pleasant phrase to-day, was momentarily forgotten; "a dry stick" sounded in his mind instead. He, "Bob," had actually become a "dry stick"!

And he was only forty-one. He lit a cigarette, and mused. Beyond the open window the flowers of the garden were bright in sunshine, and the fountain tinkled dreamily. There was a nursemaid with a child among the flowers; he wondered, for a moment, whether he would have done well to marry.

Marvellous, in looking back, how suddenly success had come!—marvellous to remember how hard he had had to flog his brain at the beginning to earn a legal guinea; if one managed to turn the second corner at the Bar at all, one sped on with a rush. But how unlikely it had looked that he would ever turn that corner!

How unlikely it had looked in the days when he belonged to the Amity Club and fellows used

to quote his jokes he flashed over a tankard and a steak at three in the morning! If his boyish hopes had been justified, if he had had talent as an actor, perhaps life would have tasted better to him, after all? "Robert Blackstone, K.C." He would soon be that. "Robert Blackstone, K.C., M.P."? He might expect it. "Sir Robert Blackstone, Solicitor-General"? It was on the cards. Why wouldn't his heart swell at the prospect, why didn't he catch his breath, what the deuce had become of all his emotions?

Oh! he was getting sentimental, listening to the fountain. Shut the window, ring the bell, see what briefs had come in!

"And a letter, sir."

"All right," said Robert, "put it down."

ings. It was addressed to "Robert Lawless, Esq.,"—c|o himself!

"T. R., Hetton-Le-Hole,
Durham, *May* 1*st*.

"Dear Sir,—I have come across the scrip of your farcical comedy entitled *No Flies on Flossie*, all rights of which I acquired some years ago. It is a bit antique in parts now, and I think you might like to bring it up to date. I am putting it on at O.H. Ashton-under-Lyne to see how it shapes. We rehearse at P.O.W. Manchester. The first Call is for twelve o'clock, Monday, 18th inst.—Yours faithfully,

"Cavendish Pink."

When the colour had crept back to his face, Robert laughed—the perfunctory laugh that he gave to a Judge's joke. He shrugged his shoulders. He put the letter down, and laughed again—he was acting to himself unconsciously. After a minute or two he picked it up and re-read it. How had Cavendish Pink come by the play? "Acquired" it? Not from the author. But the adventures of the manuscript were unimportant. Pink? Pink had been a rather popular comedian. On the see-saw of life Mr. Pink had gone down while Mr. Blackstone went up.

For the third time he read the letter. He

knew that "T.R." stood for "Theatre Royal," but the other abbreviations had mystified him. It recurred to him with emotion that "O.H." meant "Opera House," and that "P.O.W." meant "Prince of Wales's." That he could have forgotten these things even for a moment! He drummed his fingers on the briefs, and saw his Youth.

Of course he could have nothing to do with the matter. "*No Flies on Flossie*—the work, we understand, of Mr. Robert Blackstone, the well-known barrister," etc. He shuddered in imagining such a paragraph. He said that it was lucky "Robert Lawless" was forgotten; certainly "Robert Lawless" would reveal nothing to anyone who saw the piece at Ashton-under-Lyne, and doubtless its "run" would begin and end there

farce that had appeared to him brilliant when he wrote them. Would they appear brilliant to-day? He remembered the evening when he scribbled "Curtain," and Dick turned up and heard the last act read. "Jove! I didn't think you had it in you," Dick had said; he was sitting on the window-sill—how it all came back!—how time flew! The score of hopes and disappointments the work had brought; with what passion he had despaired at that age! Could he despair so passionately at this? And then the excitement when the thing was taken—what a whirlwind of exultance! That night that he got the news. He had dragged Dick out for oysters just before Scott's closed, and afterwards they had sat up talking till daylight. The piece was to be produced a few weeks hence, and Dick had stipulated for *two* stalls on the first night, to take his girl. . . . Thirteen years ago! And Dick was dead.

On the morrow Robert decided that he might, after all, run down to Ashton-under-Lyne. He said he would not enter the stage-door, no one should surmise that the author was present; he would simply take a seat in the dress circle like anybody else. Why not? To associate himself with *No Flies on Flossie* was impossible, but to resist the desire to peep at it would be motiveless.

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coat. In his dream it was generally winter, because he wanted to wear a fur overcoat. Nice girls waylaid him in the wings, and said, "Do write in a line for me to speak, Mr. Lawless, *please!*" And he did. The courtly consideration that he had always shown—in his dream—to the humblest members of the cast! The glowing terms in which everyone had spoken of him—in his dream! . . . It would have been agreeable to go to Manchester for the rehearsals.

About a week later he said that of course he wouldn't be so stupid, but that as a matter of fact he *could* go if he chose; he could go as "Mr. Lawless"! It was in the highest degree unlikely that anyone in a third-rate provincial company would know his face. He wouldn't do it, because he had long ago left such follies behind, but there was really nothing else to prevent him.

"The first Call is for twelve o'clock, Monday, 18th instant." Constantly the man thought of it, sometimes he fingered the letter again; daily, in the drawer of his desk, under the documents, under the briefs, it tempted him—the Call from the past.

Oh, out of the question!

He supposed it *would* be a folly?

After all, should he go?

If the Easter Term did not end on the 16th of

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carried a little tremor with it; but it was not unpleasant. These addresses to his hand, moreover, would spare him trouble.

Rain was falling when he shaved. No matter —it would be well to make his arrangements before he went to the rehearsal! He breakfasted briskly, opposite a commercial traveller who performed extraordinary feats with a knife and fork. At ten o'clock he had his bag put on to a cab. "All Saints," he said, for in Manchester all theatrical landladies and All Saints are neighbours.

The side streets of All Saints were not prepossessing. As he rang the first bell, he glanced about him wonderingly. Had he really been happy in places like this when he was young? He was relieved when the slatternly householder answered that she had only a "combined room." He interviewed several householders without success.

Gradually the manner in which he made his applications lost something of its legal stiffness; he laboured for a touch of the old-time freedom which he knew was demanded by the situation. He rang another bell, and a young woman in curling-pins came to the door.

"What rooms have you got this week?" asked Robert, uneasily familiar.

"What do you want?" said the woman.

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meant for her. "I'm fortunate to find you 'letting' this week."

"Well, it's like this, it gives me something to do when I'm at home. That's what my husband says; he says, 'It gives you something to do.' And I don't take ladies, they're a bit too much—'Can we 'ave some 'ot water, Ma?' all hours of the day; 'Can I come and 'eat my curling-tongs in the kitchen fire, Ma?' Ladies are a handful, and, as I say, I only let as a 'obby. I'm going on tour again in August. Perhaps you've seen me in the Halls?"

"I've often applauded you in the Halls," he said, courteously untruthful; "I was puzzled why your face was so familiar to me." He was conscious that he hadn't recovered the note yet, he knew that he was being much too formal. Could he pluck up the spirit to call a landlady "Ma" again himself?

There was an unaccustomed exhilaration in his veins as he drove to the Prince of Wales's; he did not define the feeling, but what he felt was "younger." When the cab jerked to a stoppage, his pulses beat like a lover's. He leapt out, and saw "Stage Entrance" painted on a dirty door. Again he pulled a stage-door open. "What name?" he was asked; "Mr. Lawless," he answered. And all at once he did not know if he

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erous man left him, he thanked Heaven. Vaguely he thought of making his escape, of sending a telegram to say he was recalled to town.

"Mr. Lawless?"

A pale, shabby girl had come to him. She had very beautiful grey eyes; he was surprised that he had overlooked her.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'm to play 'Flossie'—I wanted to ask you a question about her. Is she simple in the first act, or only putting it on?"

He had no longer any views on the subject, but it would never do to say so.

"Simple," he said. "Oh, decidedly simple in the first act."

"That's what I thought!" she nodded, "and Mr. Pink wants me to do it the other way—Mr. Pink says she is only putting it on."

He perceived that he had encouraged her to defy the management.

"Of course," he added hastily, "when I say 'simple,' I mean relatively simple—everything is relative."

"Oh, y-e-s," she said. But she was evidently at sea. After a moment she went on, "What I really want to know is how she is to speak those lines sitting on the hamper—is she sincere in that speech or isn't she?"

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again—he was again abrupt: "Once I knew every line of the three acts by heart."

She lifted her eyes to him gravely, and didn't speak for a second. He liked her for not speaking—he saw that she understood.

"How it must take you back!" she whispered.

He sighed—and smiled. "So, you see, Mr. Pink probably knows more about your part today than the author does.—Er—you needn't tell all the company what I've said."

"As if I should!" she exclaimed. "Oh! there's my cue, I must fly!"

"Miss Wilson!" shouted Pink. "Come on, Miss Wilson, please—take up your cues!"

"My fault," called Robert, "*I'm* to blame."

She looked back over her shoulder, smiling at him as she ran, and somehow the rehearsal was more interesting to Robert. The nice girl read the lines he had invented thirteen years before—and listening to her, he remembered.

Rain was falling when the rehearsal finished. She hadn't an umbrella. "Which way do you go?" he asked as the stage-door slammed.

"All Saints," she replied; "Rumford Street."

"That's my way, too. I want a cab—I can give you a lift."

"A cab?" She was openly astonished. "If

you *must* squander money, you can take a penny car. But why not walk?"

"Is that what you do in the wet?"

"Well, if I took a cab every time it was wet in Manchester, my salary wouldn't go far, would it?"

"I have no idea what your salary is."

"Three pounds," she said frankly. "It isn't much for a leading lady, eh?"

"It isn't much for a leading lady, but it's a good deal for a young girl. In any other business three pounds a week wants a lot of earning."

"Oh, I know," she said. "I've got young brothers in the city. They call me 'the millionaire of the family.'"

"Do they like your being on tour alone?"

fession eight years now. You're giving me all your unbrella."

"There's no expense attached to that," said Robert.

The cars were full, and she was evidently averse from a cab; so they went along Oxford Street afoot, keeping close together.

"I suppose you'll go and see a show to-night?" she inquired.

"I hadn't thought of it," he said. "Shall *you?*"

"There's nothing else to do when one isn't playing. It's ghastly sitting in diggings all the evening, isn't it?"

"It must be dull if you're alone," he assented. It occurred to him that his own evening was going to be very dull indeed.

"Oh, I'm not alone, I'm with the girl who plays 'Aunt Rachel'; but it's dull anyhow. We thought of asking for seats at the St. James's."

"I—I think',' said Robert, "that I'll go, too. Perhaps I shall see you there. Or we might all go together, mightn't we?"

"Why, yes," she replied, "it would be very nice. Let's!"

"It would be delightful!" said Robert. "Yes, let's!"

They had reached her door, and she asked him if he would go in and have some tea. He said he

would. They found the other girl at home, toasting crumpets. Miss Wilson toasted crumpets. Robert toasted crumpets also. They all knelt on the hearthrug and toasted crumpets together. His hostesses cried that they were "rising in their profession, having the author to tea!" He laughed. He cracked a joke. He wondered what Edward would say if he could see him.

At the St. James's the girls obtained two stalls for nothing, and Robert insisted on paying for one, though Miss Wilson reproved him for such waste of money. "We could quite easily have asked for three," she said. "It *is* silly of you! You make me angry."

Greatly daring, he proposed supper when the performance was over. The restaurants of Man-

They chattered gaily as far as her apartments. "I can't ask you in after the show," she murmured.

"No, I know," he said—"I remember!" As he strolled on, he reflected that the day had been remarkably agreeable. He made for his lodging in high good humour. In Oxford Street he started, he received a shock, almost he staggered —he had perceived that he was whistling!

The terpsichorean gymnast gave him eggs boiled to perfection in the morning, and much better coffee than he got at home. As he tapped the second shell, it occurred to Robert that he had not opened a newspaper yesterday. Extraordinary! How often he had winced in recollecting that he never looked at a newspaper when he was a provincial actor! And actually he had been as bad again. He bought *The Manchester Guardian,* and other papers after breakfast—and kept glancing at the clock.

It was rather jolly to sally forth to rehearsal, though when it was time to go, rain was falling. He entered the theatre with zest to-day. Even he resented less stiffly the vociferous man's calling him "my boy." Miss Wilson's pale face smiled at him as at a friend. He conversed with one or two other members of the company, and saw his way to inserting a topical allusion in the

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"I have to go on Tuesday," he marked presently; "and then it'll be all over."

"But you're coming to Ashton-under-Lyne for the production?"

"I don't know; I don't know that I shall be able to. I wish I hadn't to go back—I haven't enjoyed anything so much for years. By the way, I want you to do me a favour—I want you girls to come to supper with me on Monday night. I thought we might go and see a show"—he didn't notice that he was saying "show" again, instead of "theatre"—"and have a little supper here afterwards. I'd suggest a restaurant, but there'd be no time to eat anything before we were turned out."

"What would your landlady say?"

"I've sounded her. I said, 'I suppose you wouldn't think there was any harm in my bringing two ladies in to supper after the show one evening?' 'Certainly not, Mr. Lawless,' she said. 'Would you like it hot?' That's a landlady that *is* a landlady. Will you?"

"We'll see about it," said Miss Wilson.

"You might say 'yes,' " he begged. "Give me a happy memory for the end."

"But it won't be the end; we shall often see you, shan't we, if the piece runs?"

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Yet the tea was a she told him; somet either this afternoon- of a cupful. He h

sunny, *how* sunny! The table looked pathetic to him when she had gone. He stood at the window, downcast; the signboard of the chimney-sweep darkened the road.

Mademoiselle Superba put the simnel cake on the top of the piano, because there wasn't a sideboard, and it stood there uncovered till it was dusty. Then the night of the supper arrived, and there were a galantine, and prawns in aspic, and a mayonnaise; and the first thing the creature of moods did when she came in was to pounce on the dusty cake and devour a slice before she took her hat off.

"Peggy!" exclaimed the other girl reprovingly.

"I may?" she cried, flashing a glance at Robert. Yes, she knew she might! She knew she might do anything she chose there. "I'm going to have more light!" she said, and lit another burner of the gaselier.

Mademoiselle Superba—majestic in black silk, with pendent pearls in her ears, and her hair dressed like Truefitt's window—looked in for a moment to ask if all was well. Robert thanked her for doing it so extremely well. Peggy said sweetly, "I hear you're in the profession too?" The woman was pleased at that. So was Robert—it was nice of Peggy. Because there was no sideboard, cutlery and plates were set forth on

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real life the poor heroine has to think of the laundry bills. Oh, you'd be shocked at me in the morning! After the boys have gone, I turn a room out sometimes—my skirt pinned up, and a duster over my head. Can you see me? Mother's not very strong—the cooking's business enough for mother. Then I go up to the agents' and try to get something to do. In a *very* smart costume! with a picture hat—I made it!—and white gloves. Oh, you'd be impressed by Peggy in the afternoon; you wouldn't recognise me in the Strand. You're not seeing my best clothes here, don't think it—I'm in an engagement, I'm stopping the expenses!"

"Peggy!" groaned the other girl again. He divined a kick under the table. "You're coming down to see the dress rehearsal on the 5th, Mr. Lawless?" she struck in.

"It would be a treat to me, but I can't; I've somewhere else to go."

"It would be a 'treat' to him!" pealed Peggy. "We shall be kept in the theatre half the night—we shall be dog-tired—and *he* would find it a 'treat'! What it is to be young! Where have you to go, Mr. Dramatist?"

"I have to go to a very dull public dinner on the 5th," he said. "I shall think of you dog-

tired in the Garden Act when they serve the *chapon rôti.*"

"Send us the *chapon rôti,*" she said, "it'd be much more use." She snatched a sprig of parsley from a dish and stuck it in her hair. "Mother always tried to kill my passion for dress!" she cried.

He proffered her mayonnaise, and she said she wanted to play the piano. Though he feared that even a landlady who was a terpsichorean gymnast might have objections to her rattling "Florodora" at one in the morning, his spirits were high until she forsook the music-stool and sank to reminiscence on the hearthrug. Then she made his heart ache; she told him some of her vicissitudes—no engagement, no money, no food. His eyes filled as he listened. What this girl had been

wet, black streets of Manchester he saw the naked truth, and he realised that his life was a failure. A man could change his environment, but not himself. He felt that he would be happier earning three pounds a week, like her, on the stage than he would ever be as Robert Blackstone, K.C. One mustn't say these things, but he felt it—felt that he would rejoice to be a minor actor again, and see Peggy in the morning, and see Peggy every day.

No Flies on Flossie tottered for six nights, died, and was buried. You may read those facts elsewhere. These are facts concerning *No Flies on Flossie* which you may read only here. And in Garden Court, Temple, there was for a long time a distinguished barrister debating a subtle point. He questioned if, when he made a trip to the past and grew enamoured of it, he fell in love with a girl, or only with an atmosphere. Because that he *was* in love, still in love, was indisputable; he looked back constantly and yearned. The sole doubt was, with *what* was he in love? It was the weak spot in the case, and with his usual keenness he had put his finger on it—he discerned how liable he was to be deceived, how naturally he might be attributing to the girl the fascination that belonged to the surroundings. If it was the atmosphere that lent Peggy enchantment, he

would be insane to choose a wife so different from, say, the placid matron who blessed Edward. *Per contra,* if he loved Peggy herself, why should he tramp the room like this, instead of asking her to marry him?

He swore he did love the girl herself.

He trembled lest her halo was the limelight.

Then having come to a conclusion, he found her advertisement in *The Stage,* and wrote asking her to call on him "at Mr. Blackstone's chambers."

She went promptly. The dignified clerk ushered her into Robert's presence, and Robert had never seen that room look so gay.

"How good of you to come!" he exclaimed happily.

"He's a very recent K.C.," murmured Robert; "there's his new wig in that box."

"Oh, do let me look!" she said, darting radiantly. "May I?"

"You may even try it on, if you like," said Robert; "he wouldn't mind."

She had her hat-pins out in a second. "Oh, *isn't* Peggy going strong!" she laughed. "How does it suit me?" And then turning from the strip of glass, "Why are you so grave all of a sudden? Didn't you mean me to?"

"Yes, yes; I was thinking what a fool I had been not to beg you to come sooner," sighed Robert. "Take it off, and let me talk to you."

"Serious?"

"Very serious—an engagement."

"You *are* a trump," she said; "I wanted one so badly."

"Ah, but you mustn't accept this one unless you like it, and I hope you won't mind its being a short engagement. Peggy, I love you. I love the ground you walk on, and the clothes you wear, and everything you say and do. Will you be my wife?"

"Oh!" she gasped. Her face was colourless.

"Can't you care for me?"

"I do care," she whispered, and— It seemed incredible, yet they were round her! and his heart

was thumping like a boy's. "Oh, my sweet!" he stammered, releasing her at last. Just like a boy again—"Oh, my sweet!"

And her colour had come back, and she smiled up at him, with the smile that no other woman had ever equalled. "Let me put on my hat before Blackstone comes in," she said joyously; "look what you've done to my hair—it'd give us away!"

"Peggy," said Robert; "*I'm* Blackstone."

The smile faded; she stood gazing at him wide-eyed.

"I called myself 'Lawless' when I wrote that farce, and then I chucked writing and went in for the Bar. I had forgotten all about the thing for years when I got Pink's note, but I couldn't resist going down to the Call; I went as a lark, nobody knew me. I thought it wouldn't make any

Blackstone's the man who wears the wig and gown, and can make things right for your mother and the youngsters, and who'll give you a title by-and-by, my love; but your husband'll be the bohemian who toasted the crumpets, and lodged at mademoiselle Superba's, the terpsichorean gymnast. You shan't have time to wish for anything—I'd like to buy the Earth for you!—and you must come to hear me speak, and I want you to be proud of our position; but at home I shall always be the 'boy' who fell in love with you, Peggy, the 'Bob Lawless' who went to look for his youth—and found it!"

Beyond the open window, the flowers of the garden were bright in sunshine, and the fountain tinkled dreamily. There was a nurse-maid with a child among the flowers; he knew with thanksgiving that he was doing well to marry.

"Will you kiss me again, sweetheart?"

"Yes," she said—*"Bob!"*

THE END